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# THE NEW REPUBLIC

Martha C. Nussbaum on America's Emptiest Feminist • Jed Perl on Bernini

# VEILED THREAT

## THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION'S WOMAN PROBLEM

BY AZAR NAFISI

HE EDITORS:
CLINTON'S
STED BUDGET

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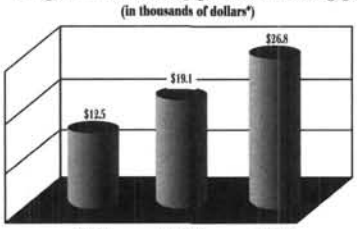


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# TRB®

## FROM WASHINGTON

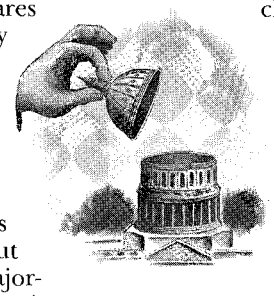
# By George

With every day, Congress seems closer to censuring the president—and further from removing him altogether—on the grounds that his misdeeds don't rise to the level of a constitutional crime. But even a decision to slap Bill Clinton with an official reprimand would implicitly endorse one of the most dangerous arguments behind the impeachment drive: that there is a seamless moral web between a politician's private acts and his performance as a public official. So, before Congress considers such a measure, it would do well to consider yet another powerful historical example—one that has not yet entered the dialogue over President Clinton's fate. That example is David Lloyd George, one of Britain's greatest national leaders.

Lloyd George was responsible not only for enacting Britain's social insurance system but also for liberating Parliament and British democracy from vetoes by the House of Lords, which Lloyd George described as "five hundred men, chosen accidentally from the unemployed." After taking over as prime minister in 1916, he led a demoralized Britain out of a military stalemate to victory in World War I. Winston Churchill wrote of him: "When the English history of the first quarter of the twentieth century is written, it will be seen that the greater part of our fortune in peace and war were shaped by this one man."

Lloyd George was the first "ranker" of humble origin to become prime minister. When he was only 18 months old, his father died, and he was raised in a Welsh village by his mother, his grandmother, and his uncle, a shoemaker. He was educated by an Anglican schoolmaster but had to be helped by his uncle to prepare for the difficult examination to become a lawyer. In 1890, he was elected to Parliament as a Liberal. He was strikingly handsome and a mesmerizing orator who had, one London editor commented, "the swiftest mind in politics." The French ambassador wrote that he was "a Welshman, not an Englishman ... enthusiastic, bright, quick-witted, and unsettled." His detractors invariably described him as a "demagogue" lacking in fixed convictions, but in retrospect he stands out as a founder of modern British and American liberalism.

Lloyd George was, however, plagued by scandals—primarily of his own making but also magnified by his Tory opponents in Parliament and in the press. From his first days in Parliament, when officials were still not paid, he augmented his income through questionable means. The most embarrassing occurred in 1912 when he was chancellor of the exchequer. Lloyd George and other government officials bought privately offered shares in the wireless company American Marconi at a time when the government was negotiating with British Marconi to establish radio communications throughout the British empire. The two companies were legally separate, but British Marconi was the majority shareholder in the American firm. The Tories attacked him mercilessly for insider trading. The scandal raged for months, although it made no impact outside of London. After an investigation controlled by the Liberals cleared the government, the Tories demanded a vote of censure, but it failed. Lloyd George, who ended up losing money on the investments, declared disingenuously during the censure debate: "I am conscious of having done nothing which brings a stain upon the honor of a minister of the Crown. If you will, I acted thoughtlessly, I acted carelessly, I acted mistakenly, but I acted innocently, I acted openly, and I acted honestly."



Lloyd George, who was married in 1888 and had five children, was also known as a philanderer. Back then, politicians' adulterous affairs were not usually publicized and did not threaten their careers unless they resulted in divorce. In 1897, however, Lloyd George reportedly had to bribe an irate husband from naming him in a divorce suit. Then, in 1909, in the midst of the climactic battle over the "People's Budget," *People*, a London tabloid, suddenly revealed that he had bought his way out of being named in yet another divorce suit. This time, he sued the newspaper for libel, and he and his wife testified falsely that its report of an affair and payoff was an "absolute invention." His eldest son later recounted the conversation between Lloyd George and his wife, Margaret:

> He knew that he would be attacked mercilessly if my mother expressed open doubt as to his innocence, if it were shown that she did not support him in his rejection of the accusation.... I know that my mother, a deeply religious woman, was in torment in giving support to the lie to be sworn on oath.... "You must help me, Maggie. If I get over this, I give my oath you shall never have to suffer this ordeal again."... "How can I rely on your oath?" "I can make it true, Maggie, I put my life in jeopardy for my beliefs. One day I shall be prime minister. I shall be a force for the public good. If you help me, you shall never regret your decision."

As a result of his and his wife's false testimony, he won a judgment against *People*, which he donated to a Welsh charity. Four years later, Lloyd George, who was 49, fell in love with Frances Stevenson, his daughter's 24-year-old tutor, and made her his private secretary and mistress. They were married 30 years later, after Lloyd George's wife died. So much for fidelity and honesty in one of Britain's greatest prime ministers.

There are, of course, striking similarities between Lloyd George and Bill Clinton, from their modest upbringing to their political style (Lloyd George was also known as a great "reconciler" for his ability to settle conflicts) to Marconi and Whitewater and *People* and Monica Lewinsky. Bill Clinton is unlikely to be remembered as one of the century's great presidents, but that is not because he lacked ability; he didn't have the political support to pass an ambitious agenda.

Either way, the moral is the same: just as sterling private character doesn't guarantee great leadership, private misdeeds are perfectly consistent with a good, even outstanding, public record. Yes, public officials can become deranged and commit heinous private acts that merit their immediate removal. But, as the nation's founders recognized, and as the public has understood from the beginning of this scandal, Congress should narrowly circumscribe its purview to include acts committed in an official capacity. It should leave to conscience, the courts, and the court of public opinion acts of adultery (even when falsely denied in court) and financial irregularities that don't arise from the pursuit of or conduct in public office. Censure, no less than impeachment, would violate these distinctions between private character and public performance.

**JOHN B. JUDIS**



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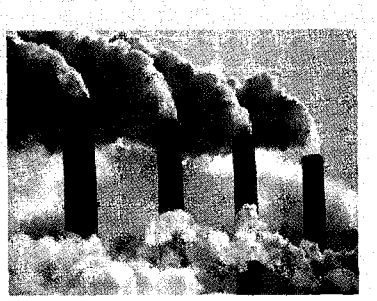

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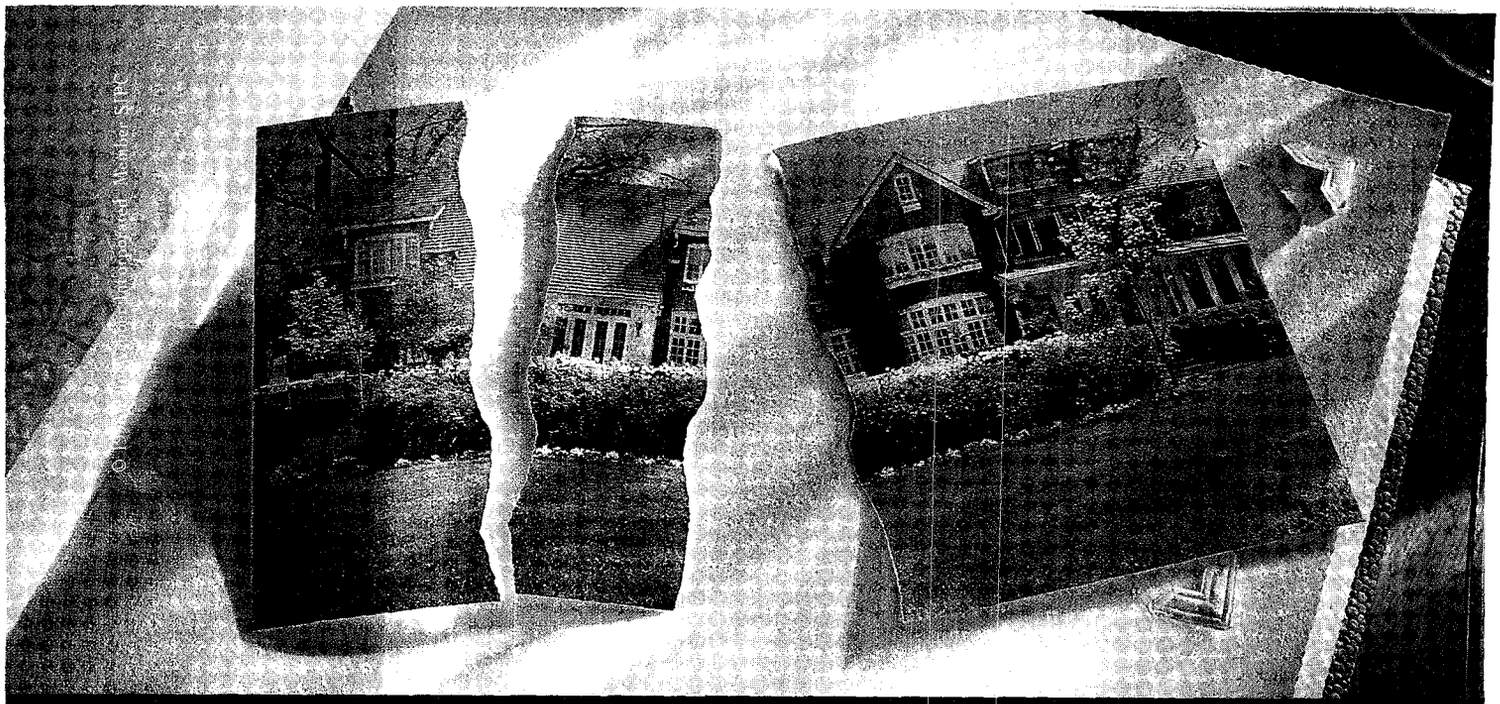

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Byrd's baggage

**To the editors:**

Bob Byrd is the Senate's memory ("Byrd Brain," by David Plotz, January 18). All institutions—governmental, educational, and corporate—need a memory. Cicero put it this way: "Not to know what happened before one was born is to remain a child."

Byrd is an expert on rules, procedures, and precedents. In any legislative body, chaos and confusion will result if you do not follow the rules.

Although the overall thrust of the article is negative, David Plotz throws in a rose: "[Byrd] is also incorruptible and fiercely devoted to the idea of public service." I wish that I deserved such an accolade. I would put it on my tombstone.

I served 18 years in the Senate with Bob Byrd. If we had not had Byrd in the Senate, we would have had to invent a pale substitute.

THOMAS F. EAGLETON
*Former United States Senator*
*St. Louis, Missouri*

**To the editors:**

David Plotz's vignette of Senator Robert Byrd is searing but accurate. The former Ku Klux Klaner was one of six senators who had the privilege of escorting into the Senate chamber Chief Justice William Rehnquist, who as a young law clerk wrote opinions against the desegregation of schools, and who as a longtime jurist has never employed a black law clerk. The chief justice was then sworn in by Senator Strom Thurmond, former Dixiecrat and champion filibusterer against civil rights bills.

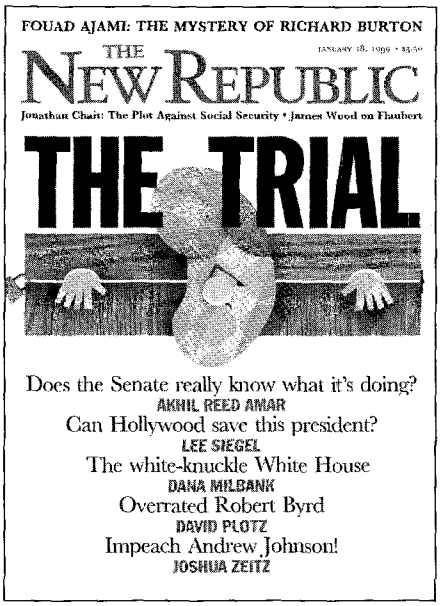
Plotz repeats, albeit incredulously, Byrd's old song and dance about joining the Klan to uphold "traditional American values" and to fight communism. But had the journalist dug deeper, he would have found proof that Byrd joined the hooded white supremacists because he loathed and feared African Americans. As cited in Graham Smith's *When Jim Crow Met John Bull*, Byrd, fearing the possible desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces in 1945, wrote the famously negrophobic Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi that he would "never submit to fight beneath that banner [the American flag] with a negro by my side. Rather I should die a thousand times, and see old Glory trampled in the dirt never to rise again, than to see this beloved land of ours become degraded by race mongrels, a throw back to the blackest specimen from the wilds."

A sexual past can trip up a politician but a racist past seems little hindrance to a long and glorious political career in America.

DAVID W. SOUTHERN
*Westminster College*
*Fulton, Missouri*

**Editor's note:**

Graham Smith came across the Byrd letter while researching Bilbo's papers at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Senator Byrd responded to TNR: "I find it interesting but, unfortunately, not surprising that these types of attacks are surfacing at this time. I have spoken openly many, many times of my brief membership more than 50 years ago in the Ku Klux Klan. I consider it a terrible mistake, which I sorely regret. I find the language and the sentiments of the Bilbo letter—which is referenced in a letter to the editor of this publication—to be deplorable."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DAVID PLOTZ
Impeach Andrew Johnson!
JOSHUA ZEITZ

**To the editors:**

Blocking the balanced budget amendment, thwarting the line-item veto, and slowing down the Contract with America are not "nonachievements." We owe Senator Byrd a debt of gratitude for having the courage to stop such pernicious acts.

JOHN H. WILDE
*Greenwood, South Carolina*

## Premature impeachment

**To the editors:**

I am used to controversy and even relish it, but it would be nice for critics to attack arguments that I have made rather than silly ones of their own construction. Your Notebook of January 18 criticizes a piece of mine published in *The Washington Post* in which I say that "I do not contest the raw constitutional power of the 105th House of Representatives to vote out a bill of impeachment." So why does your Notebook criticize me for holding the very view I so explicitly disclaim?

I present my real position at greater length in a new book, *The Case Against Lameduck Impeachment*. Once again, I make it plain that a lame-duck House and Senate have the power to impeach a president and remove him from office. But I also make it plain why a lame-duck bill of impeachment is not entitled to any special exemption from the normal rule that condemns all other pending bills to expiration on January 3, when the old Congress is replaced by another. Just as an ordinary piece of House legislation must be approved again by the House before it can be made into a law by the Senate, so too must a bill of impeachment gain the consent of a majority of our freshly elected representatives before it can be given renewed constitutional force. There is no sound constitutional reason for endowing bills of impeachment with special survival powers that all other bills lack.

It follows that the Senate trial is utterly unconstitutional so long as the new House does not vote out a new bill of impeachment.

Perhaps you find this position legally incorrect, but I would like to know why.

BRUCE ACKERMAN
*Sterling Professor of Law and Political Science, Yale University*
*New Haven, Connecticut*

**The editors reply:**

We would answer Bruce Ackerman's question with one of our own: Is it the legitimacy of the lame-duck impeachment of Bill Clinton that troubles him or the legitimacy of lame-duck impeachment in general? If the former, then the fact that the House has effectively voted to approve the lame-duck impeachment bill by reauthorizing the appointment of House managers would seem to eliminate the problem. If the latter, then we would simply say that one man's pejorative "raw power" is another man's wise and necessary emergency power. In any case, in none of Ackerman's writings has he supplied convincing evidence to support his main contention: that the drafters of the Twentieth Amendment shared his view.

## Bad behavior

**To the editors:**

In "Trial and Tribulation," Akhil Reed Amar thoughtfully challenges the use of impeachment and removal of certain federal judges as a precedent for the



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treatment of presidents (January 18). Here's another comparison: While senators or representatives can be expelled from office by their peers for conduct short of high crimes, not one (not even diary-altering Senator Packwood) has ever been expelled where the primary offense was perjury or lying. Indeed, in two cases of perjury aggravated by other offenses, those of Senators Brooke and Talmadge in 1978–80, the Senate did not even reduce their seniority.

JONATHAN S. GELLMAN
*Riverdale, New York*

**To the editors:**

Akhil Reed Amar's perceptive and creative discussion of the constitutional differences between the impeachment of a U.S. president and any other civil officer travels down many fascinating roads. But here's a turn he didn't mention: While Article II states that all civil officers shall be impeached for "high Crimes and Misdemeanors," Article III makes clear that judges "shall hold their Offices during good behavior." It seems the Framers meant for judges, in particular, to be held to a lower, even more general standard for removal from office: something akin to "bad" behavior. Thus, any analogies made between our present impeachment and those of members of the judiciary are fatally flawed.

RICHARD AVIDON
*Washington, D.C.*

**To the editors:**

"Trial and Tribulation" by Akhil Reed Amar lays out an impressive argument, but I disagree with his line of reasoning on the impeachment of Andrew Johnson. Amar refers to Johnson's policies toward certain individuals as being "akin to treason" and later talks of Johnson's beneficiaries as actual traitors. I assume he refers to secession as the traitorous act. But it was Lincoln—not the Constitution—who found secession to be a traitorous act. One can speculate on how many states would have joined up knowing it was a one-way street.

JOHN L. MCLUCAS
*Alexandria, Virginia*

**Akhil Reed Amar replies:**

At the Founding, no leading supporter of the Constitution ever tried to woo doubters by promising that a state could ratify and yet thereafter remain free to leave whenever it chose. Instead, Madison insisted that each state must ratify "in toto and for ever"; Hamilton (in *Federalist 11*) spoke of "a strict and indissoluble Union"; Jay (in *Federalist 5*) made clear that the American Union would be like the permanent union of Scotland and England in 1707; and Wilson declared that the "bonds" of union must be "indissolubly strong." So I think Lincoln was right.

## L.A. story

**To the editors:**

Robert Brustein's article "The Las Vegas Show" (January 4 & 11) contains some factual errors. The Bellagio Hotel cost $1.6 billion to construct, and this amount includes the $300 million art collection (not "billions to build" and "$240 million" art collection). Also, the megabucks slot win was not $264 million, but $27.3 million—a big difference as far as free millions go. Finally, the Luxor Hotel has been open for some five years now and is remodeling (while remaining open) and not "now under construction" and closed "until the engineers iron out some ventilation problems." If Brustein expects his observations to be both witty and acerbic, he ought to pay more attention to detail.

LISA M. BYBEE
*Henderson, Nevada*

## Suspension

**To the editors:**

In his review of *The Last Avant-Garde* ("The Limits of Fun," January 4 & 11), Christopher Benfey claims inaccurately that I "expel three pretenders"—Edwin Denby, Barbara Guest, Harry Mathews—from the New York School. No disinterested reader of my book could arrive at this conclusion. I do not "expel" these important writers, nor do I regard them as "pretenders." Each has a vital place in the history of the New York School. Each is cited, quoted, and discussed in *The Last Avant-Garde* if not so elaborately as the four poets at the center of my narrative.

DAVID LEHMAN
*New York, New York*

**Christopher Benfey replies:**

I used the word "expel" partly in jest, as in "expelled from school"—the New York School in this case. David Lehman's preferences are clear and in line with the prejudices of his four main figures. "In concentrating on Ashbery, Koch, O'Hara, and Schuyler," he writes in *The Last Avant-Garde*, "I know I must necessarily stint other admirable writers in their circle, such as Edwin Denby ... Barbara Guest, and Harry Mathews. It is no slur on these writers to observe that they do not seem nearly as central to the New York School in the 1950s as the quartet I have chosen to emphasize. This was the 'secret' conviction of the poets themselves."


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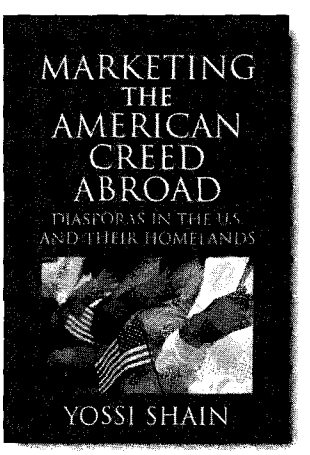
***Yossi Shain***




This book examines the interaction of domestic and foreign issues in the lives of ethnic Americans. Arguing that the damaging impact of ethnic influences on U.S. foreign affairs has been overstated and misrepresented, Shain brings a new dimension to the public debate on multiculturalism by exploring its transnational aspects. Ethnic groups, despite residual attachments to their homelands, do not betray American political values and ideals, but, on the contrary, their involvement in homeland related affairs has been instrumental in their dissemination inside and outside the U.S.. Shain evaluates ethnic groups in the U.S. from a broad theoretical and comparative perspective, and his case studies include, among others, Arab-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and African-Americans.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

FEBRUARY 22, 1999

# UNREFORMED

The annual squabbling over the White House budget proposal is officially under way. Clinton is touting the plan as a "prudent but progressive" approach to government—a sentiment supported by the editorial pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* Republican leaders, in turn, are trashing the spending blueprint as a return to big government. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Archer of Texas calls it "a throwback to the days when the government tried to solve problems by raising taxes and throwing money at problems."

We're not ready to join either the enthusiasts or the naysayers. There is much of merit in the plan—specifically, a belated and modest but real increase in military spending and an interesting proposal to reserve budget surpluses for Social Security and invest part of the money in the stock market. There is much that is dubious—a fat expansion of pay and benefits for federal workers, for example. Yet the main feature of the Clinton budget is that it is essentially a political document. The main selling points are modest new spending increases on poll-tested domestic initiatives—$1.5 billion for community-oriented policing here, $1 billion for welfare-to-work programs there—and $37 billion worth of poll-tested, "targeted" middle-class tax breaks, which are supposed to be paid for mostly by a fat increase in regressive tobacco taxes. If the whole package passed, it would create an inflation-adjusted increase in discretionary spending of only one percent. Overall spending would shrink to 19.4 percent of GDP, the lowest share in a quarter of a century.

Like last year's budgetary smorgasbord, this year's is unlikely ever to become law. The real purpose of the tax break proposals is to head off the Republicans' call for an across-the-board ten percent income tax cut. And it'll probably work, since Clinton's 37 proposed new cuts include such motherhood and apple-pie ideas as a $1,000 credit to help families pay for long-term care for elderly or infirm relatives, a $1,000 credit for work-related expenses for the disabled, and a $500 credit for stay-at-home parents with a youngster under the age of one. (Indeed, this last idea is literally a tax break for motherhood, or at least parenthood.)

This would all be harmless enough if it weren't for the ideological signal Clinton is sending by validating the notion that the tax code should be the federal government's instrument for achieving social objectives. It seems that, by the end of this presidency, nothing whatsoever will be left of the Democratic Party's erstwhile commitment to tax reform. Back in 1986, Senator Bill Bradley and Representative Dick Gephardt, with the eventual support of the Reagan administration, led a successful push to overhaul the nation's tax code. The goal of the reform effort was to eliminate the largest number of special breaks possible, thus broadening the tax base, simplifying the code, and making it possible to collect just as much revenue at much lower (but still progressive) marginal rates.

Tax reform was New Democrat thinking par excellence. As the first Democratic president since those reforms, however, Clinton has taken tax policy in precisely the opposite direction ever since his first inauguration. (You want simplification? The Treasury Department's *summary* of Clinton's latest tax proposals is 198 pages long.) Clinton's tax proposals are New Democratic only in the political sense: they are designed to appeal to the suburban middle class rather than to reward the party's traditional constituencies. But, in terms of the principles of tax reform, this is no different from Republican efforts to shower their upper-income constituents with special breaks.

To be sure, Clinton has chosen to do this largely because a Republican Congress has blocked the more straightforward approach of spending money on new programs. Yet his expediency may eventually come back to haunt his party. The Republicans' current obsession with a quick tax cut should not obscure the fact that their long-term objective remains some kind of flat tax—a phony version of tax reform whose purported gains in tax-code simplification would come at the expense of progressivity. Thanks to Clinton, it will be that much more difficult for his party to mount a principled resistance. •



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# NOTEBOOK

UNMAGICAL REALISM: The Clinton tragicomedy isn't over yet, but the comedy is certainly gaining on the tragedy. This week saw the appearance in *Salon* of "The Mysteries of Bill Clinton," an unwittingly hilarious piece by Gabriel García Márquez, the Nobel Prize-winning writer and toady. Almost every one of García Márquez's special qualities is deliciously evident. The gigantism: "The first thing you notice about Bill Clinton is how tall he is." The vanity: "Carlos Fuentes and I have good reason for considering that evening [at the Styrons' on the Vineyard, natch, where they dined with Monica's swain in 1995] as a whole chapter in our memoirs. From the beginning we were disarmed by the interest, respect, and humor with which he listened to us, treating our words as if they were gold dust." The banality: "At 49, he looked like an exuberant survivor of the generation of '68, who had smoked marijuana, knew the Beatles by heart, and had demonstrated against the Vietnam war." The Fidel-olatry: "If Fidel and you could sit and talk face to face [the writer told the president], all problems would completely disappear." The paranoid knowingness: "The vase of flowers that appears behind the president in photographs ... has been claimed by the press to be a hiding place for microphones to consecrate the mysteries of presidential audiences." The cheap machismo: "Clinton denied having any sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky, and denied it with his head held high, like any self-respecting unfaithful husband." The cheap melodrama: "[His] secret life will go into the history books not for having made love badly but for having made it a lot less glorious than it should be." (You can almost hear Antonio Banderas speaking those lines.) The forgiveness of politically inconvenient evil: "Suffering from mental fatigue, Clinton committed the unpardonable folly of violently punishing an invented enemy 5,397 nautical miles from the White House, to distract attention from his personal plight." An invented enemy! Still, the great writer's witless apologia is not altogether worthless. It paints a portrait of Bill Clinton whose verisimilitude we do not doubt. The president is reported to have told García Márquez that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is his favorite book, which jibes with what we know about his unctuousness, and that the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius was also his favorite book, which jibes with what we know about his doubleness. When the conversation got around to "the affinities between Caribbean writers and the clusters of great Southern novelists ... Clinton, born and raised in Arkansas, a Southern state, applauded the notion and professed himself happy to be a Caribbean." Way to go, *caballero*! When asked who he considered his enemies, "his reply was immediate and abrupt: 'My only enemy is right-wing religious fundamentalism.'" This, too, sounds true. At one point García Márquez has Clinton reciting passages from *Don Quixote* from memory, which is even more ridiculous than Sidney Blumenthal's description to Kenneth Starr of Clinton comparing himself to Rubashov in *Darkness at Noon.* (Maybe Clinton just entertained the Styrons' guests with a few bars of "The Impossible Dream.") What does *Salon* hope to accomplish with this drivel? Ugly times call for ugly tactics, we suppose.

NONCONSENSUAL BEHAVIOR:

***Commission Nears a Consensus on Redesigning Medicare***

—*The New York Times*, January 27, 1999.

**Medicare Reform Panel Split**

—*The Washington Post*, same day.

(Thanks to Phil Ellis of Arlington, Virginia.)

HOME NEWS: With this issue, TNR welcomes new senior editor Michelle Cottle. Michelle joins us from her former post as editor of *The Washington Monthly*, where she wrote with characteristic verve about everything from Vernon Jordan's power-brokering to the way men's magazines stoke the anxieties of American males. We also bid fond farewell to Margaret Talbot, who has served the magazine since 1995 as an executive editor and senior editor. She joins the New America Foundation as a senior fellow. Associate editor Jonathan Chait also begins a one-year leave of absence during which he, too, will be a fellow at New America.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS: Due to an editing error, last week's article on Social Security by Matthew Miller ("Slick," February 15) incorrectly identified Richard Darman as President Reagan's former budget director. He served in that post under President Bush. In the same issue, Ann Louise Bardach's article on Tom DeLay ("DeLayed Justice") quoted DeLay as describing the impeachment battle as a contest of "relativism versus absolute values." The correct quotation is "relativism versus absolute truth." Also, the article suggested that Robert Blankenship's suit against DeLay charged the defendant with "injunctive relief." Injunctive relief was, rather, one of the remedies sought by the plaintiffs for other alleged torts. Edward Rothstein's article "Same Old Story" (January 25) incorrectly stated that Congress subpoenaed Judge Robert Bork's video-rental records during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings. They actually made it into the public domain via a report in a Washington, D.C., weekly newspaper. Our apologies for these errors. •



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**The coddling of David Duke.**

# SOUTHERN COMFORT

*By Tyler Bridges*

No sooner had David Duke announced his bid for Bob Livingston's congressional seat in Louisiana than the national Republican Party began disavowing him. "There is no room in the party of Lincoln for a Klansman like David Duke," said Jim Nicholson, chairman of the Republican National Committee. "David Duke is a vicious racist and bigot," said Representative Peter King, a Long Island Republican. Yet, in the state where the election will be held, the reaction has been a bit different. While many in Louisiana talk about how Duke "embarrasses" the party, few have called him what he is: namely, a racist and an anti-Semite.

With a crowded field of strong contenders arrayed against him, and the highest negative rating of any politician in the campaign, Duke is a long shot. His only chance is to get a fifth or so of the vote in the open primary and squeak into a runoff against a Democrat in the overwhelmingly Republican district. But that begs the question: Why are so few Bayou State Republicans going out of their way to disavow this man? The answer can be found in the recent past, for, in the Louisiana Republican Party, David Duke has frequently been accepted—and, in some cases, even welcomed.

The dichotomy between the national and Louisiana Republicans over Duke became apparent almost immediately in 1989, when Duke first burst on the scene as a credible candidate for the state House. Then-Republican National Chairman Lee Atwater responded by condemning Duke for intolerance and bigotry. Atwater also said the RNC would provide no assistance to Duke. President Reagan, who had just left office, and President Bush each made the unusual move of intervening in a state legislative race by endorsing Duke's opponent.

Louisiana Republicans, however, took a more conciliatory approach—because they sensed the potency of Duke's attacks on affirmative action, minority set-asides, and welfare programs. When a state representative made a challenge to keep Duke from entering the Louisiana House, on the basis of well-documented evidence that he did not live in his suburban New Orleans district, 15 of the 18 House Republicans voted to seat him. State Representative Emile "Peppi" Bruneau of New Orleans, who was chairman of the Republican legislative caucus, helped Duke draft bills and taught him parliamentary procedure.

When asked why he was helping Duke, Bruneau said that Duke was no different from any other Republican. After Duke's election, the party caucus newsletter featured a photograph and short profile of him that omitted his Klan past, saying only, "He ran on a conservative platform." Duke would repeatedly point to the newsletter profile and his good standing in the Republican caucus to blunt charges of extremism. "I'm an accepted member of the Republican legislative caucus," he would say. "They vote for my bills."

Later, Beth Rickey, a 32-year-old loyal Republican from New Orleans, tried to get the Louisiana Republican Party to censure Duke. But the effort went nowhere. The state party chairman, Billy Nungesser, told Rickey he was killing her effort because it would just give Duke undue publicity, but other party leaders told her privately they feared attacking Duke would discourage pro-Duke Democrats from switching to the GOP.

Rickey tried again, and, in September 1989, she forced a vote. The Republican State Central Committee crushed her motion; only about 25 of the committee's members voted for Rickey's measure. "To censure me would be an action against their own constituencies," crowed Duke afterward. Rickey was furious. "I've been surprised over the past six months at the tacit support for Duke," she told reporters. After the vote, State Central Committee members berated Rickey for bringing the censure motion to a vote.

It's almost certainly true that many Louisiana Republicans just weren't all that bothered by Duke's worldview. But the party's soft treatment of Duke doubtless reflected a political calculation, as well. In the late '80s and early '90s, with the state still suffering from the oil bust, Duke's race-based message struck a chord in the frustrated and angry electorate. When Duke challenged Senator J. Bennett Johnston, a Democrat, in 1990, he drew huge all-white crowds around the state at old-fashioned rallies. Duke eventually lost to Johnston, 54 percent to 43.5 percent, but he got 60 percent of the white vote. When Duke ran for governor the next year, he finished second in the open primary—ousting the incumbent Republican governor, Buddy Roemer, who finished third. Duke lost badly to Edwin Edwards, a Democrat, in the runoff election, 61 percent to 39 percent. But, once again, he did well among whites, garnering 55 percent of their votes.

Duke's trajectory since then has taken him closer to the margins. In 1992, he launched a disastrous challenge against Bush in the Republican presidential primaries, never winning more than eleven percent in any state. He flirted with running for governor in 1995, then tried for the Senate in 1996. Again, the results were disappointing. He placed fourth in the open primary with eleven percent of the vote.

Nevertheless, Duke has wormed his way into the state party infrastructure. In September 1997, for example, he was elected chairman of the Republican Executive Committee in St. Tammany Parish, which sits across Lake Pontchartrain from New Orleans. "My agenda is in line with the people of this parish, the state, and the



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Republicans of this nation," Duke said after the vote.

One reason for his reemergence may be a never-publicized deal that Duke claims he made with Louisiana's current governor, Republican Mike Foster. According to Duke, the two men met back in 1995, when Foster was running for governor, first over breakfast at a New Orleans hotel—and then in a three-hour meeting at Foster's plantation home in the rural community of Franklin, Louisiana. Duke says that, under the agreement, he agreed to endorse Foster and commit the grassroots support of his backers to Foster's campaign. In exchange, according to Duke, Foster promised two things: to sign a law prohibiting affirmative action in state contracts and to refrain from condemning Duke in the 1996 Senate race. "We became friends at that point," Duke said, adding that he has spoken to Foster several times since Foster became governor. "In politics, you make certain alliances," he added.

Duke did endorse Foster; Foster did sign an order ending affirmative action in his first week as governor; Foster did refuse to denounce Duke in the Senate race. But Foster has denied that those actions were part of any deal. "I don't know of any agreement like that with Duke," he told me during a 1996 interview. As for Duke's contention that they met at Foster's plantation for three hours, the governor said: "He may have come over. My home is open to the public. It costs six dollars [for a tour]. I haven't had him over for any barbecues, that's for sure." Again, though, Foster would comment on Duke no further. And, when I called Foster's press secretary recently to ask about the meetings, she said, "The governor is not going to discuss David Duke, and neither am I." She repeated this statement four times.

This much, at least, is certain: Duke's public endorsement of Foster, who was then a little-known state senator trailing badly in the polls, was pivotal in the 1995 race. Ironically, the Republican who was leading at that time, former Governor Roemer, refused to take Duke's call when Duke offered a deal that he says was similar to the one Foster accepted. "David Duke was, is, and will always be a racist," Roemer said in 1996—issuing the kind of statement Foster has never brought himself to make. The furthest Foster has ever gone is the vague statement that "I have not, do not, and will not condone racism, anti-Semitism, or bigotry in any form."

To be sure, Foster has little in common with Duke. He is a pro-business, pro-education Republican who wins favor in Louisiana because, despite being fabulously wealthy, he passes himself off as a plain-speaking farmer who likes to hunt and fish. However, Foster is up for reelection this year—and Duke's old constituency forms a key voting bloc in the state. Indeed, when asked recently about Duke's congressional bid, Foster replied, "It's a free country, isn't it?"

Duke, meanwhile, has become more openly racist and anti-Semitic than he was during his heyday. Where he once distanced himself from his white supremacist friends, he now appears at events sponsored by the National Alliance, a neo-Nazi group headed by a one-time physicist named William Pierce, author of *The Turner Diaries,* Timothy McVeigh's personal political bible. When I saw Duke speak at a National Alliance-sponsored event in Tallahassee in July 1997, he preached that whites are inherently more intelligent than blacks, who, he said, naturally excel in sports and music. In our recent interview, he returned to a theme he had kept hidden during his heyday: how Jews are on a quest to weaken the white race. "Jews control the media," he told me. Through this control, he has explained, they promote welfare, race-mixing, and integration—all of this to the detriment of whites, or "European Americans," as he prefers, who are better off remaining pure and segregated from blacks.

Livingston has decided to resign effective February 28, and the election will likely be held on May 1. And, while Livingston has said he doesn't want Duke to win the seat, like so many others in the Louisiana GOP he has not opted for the path of Atwater or Roemer. Instead, he has declined to take any further measures to oppose Duke, vowing that he will stay neutral in the open primary.

Livingston's spokesman, Mark Carollo, emphasizes that "Bob Livingston has never done anything to help, nor would he do anything to help David Duke.... He believes it would be tragic for Louisiana and America for Duke to become the congressman for the first district." But the moral outrage that you might expect Duke to provoke remains muted. Indeed, when I asked Carollo if he wanted to elaborate on why Livingston thinks Duke would be bad for the district, he replied, "That's as much as I can say on the record."

TYLER BRIDGES, author of *The Rise of David Duke,* is a political reporter at *The Miami Herald.*

**LOS ANGELES DISPATCH**

# L.A. LAW

*By Matthew Miller*

When Los Angeles last week became the first big city to limit citizens to one handgun purchase each month, it struck a blow not only against illegal gun traffickers but against the "slippery slope" rhetoric now rampant in America's political discourse. You hear it almost daily: "Yes," says zealot X or interest group Y, "the proposal at hand seems harmless enough. But the chain of further steps it will set in motion involves unambiguous evil." The paranoia is bipartisan. A ban on "partial birth" abortion becomes



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tantamount to *Roe* v. *Wade*'s repeal. Tiny new private savings accounts mean the death of Social Security. Leaving Bill Clinton in office assures an epidemic of perjury.

Some slopes, of course, do turn out to be slippery. (Remember Munich.) But most aren't. Normal citizens put off by shrill non sequiturs find them one more good reason to tune politics out, even as the fiery sound bites gin up extremists, thus making it more difficult for the center to govern. That's what makes L.A.'s new gun ordinance a breakthrough that could save both lives and language. Rarely is the fallacy of the slippery slope so neatly on display as it is in the National Rifle Association's attempt to persuade voters that one gun per month is not enough—a campaign that borders on self-parody.

The idea behind one-gun is to stop "straw" purchases, in which people who can legally buy guns—say, a gang member's girlfriend or a gunrunner's pal—front for bad guys who can't (or who don't want to be traced). Gun traffickers often pay straw purchasers to buy guns in bulk, which they then resell at huge profits on the black market. Modern one-gun efforts date to 1993, when Virginia was eager to shed its reputation as the "firearms supermarket" of the East Coast. At the time, its dealers supplied an estimated 40 percent of the guns seized in New York City crimes. Maryland enacted a similar law in 1996. South Carolina passed one in 1975 after "60 Minutes" profiled the state as a gunrunner's dream.

These laws have generally yielded tangible results, and that inspired California Assemblyman Wally Knox, a Los Angeles Democrat, to introduce a one-gun bill in Sacramento in 1997. The effort met early and predictable resistance from the NRA, whose lobbying killed it in the state legislature, and it seemed essentially dead since cities were reluctant to pass such gun laws on their own—lest they face costly NRA lawsuits claiming that less restrictive state laws preempted the local rules. Then, in December, California's Supreme Court let stand an appeals court ruling that upheld West Hollywood's ban on Saturday night specials. The ruling emboldened other cities to act.

Enter Michael Feuer, a brainy, 40-year-old city councilman in Los Angeles who, over the past three years, has earned both the NRA's enmity and a reputation for good governance. In 1997, Feuer passed a measure that required trigger locks on weapons and background checks for gunstore employees. His Municipal Gun Violence Working Group tries to coordinate policies in the region so crooks can't "city hop" to evade tough rules. (In a wonderfully perverse twist, the NRA cites the prevalence of this practice as proof that local laws are futile, even as it fights stricter statewide laws that would make local action unnecessary.)

Even with crime rates down, Feuer notes, Los Angeles County had 1,200 handgun-related deaths in 1997—


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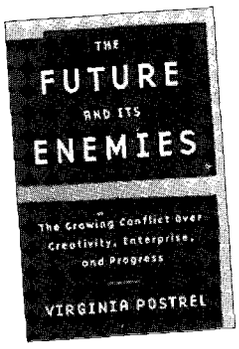


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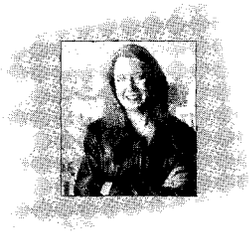

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one in six of them a child. So, armed with a study showing that straw purchases were responsible for a quarter of the guns used in L.A. crimes, plus tearful testimony from mothers who'd lost kids to shootings, Feuer on January 27 whisked the one-gun ordinance through a unanimous council. To make the plan work, Feuer got the new attorney general to tweak state computers to share gun-purchase data with cities, a sensible policy on which, according to Feuer, Attorney General Dan Lungren's office dragged its feet.

Now, however, comes the hard part. Stephen Helsley, the NRA's chief California lobbyist, says the group didn't fight in Los Angeles because it didn't stand a chance with council liberals. But the NRA is worried that other, similar efforts may follow. West Hollywood already plans to take up its own one-gun measure. San Francisco is interested, too. Knox, encouraged by Democratic gains in November, will try again in Sacramento. As a result, the NRA will likely take one-gun to state court in order to discourage other cities from joining the bandwagon. For Feuer, retaliation could get personal. In 1994, the NRA bankrolled a controversial recall movement against prominent anti-gun state Senator Dave Roberti. Though Roberti prevailed, the pricey attack sent a message about the risks of crossing the gun lobby.

Far more intriguing than the politics of this issue, though, is the NRA's creative logic. Consider their argument. For starters, says the NRA, you don't need a one-gun-per-month rule because straw purchase resales between private citizens absent a licensed dealer are already illegal. "Well, no kidding," says Detective Mark Warschaw of the LAPD's gun unit. Los Angeles has twelve cops to comb 464 square miles in pursuit of the 2,000 or so straw-purchased guns each year. Even if they could hunt down all the bad guys this way, officers explain, it's typically after the fact. Prosecutors, meanwhile, are loath to bring charges when there's no witness to the illegal transaction, which in the real world means almost never. The NRA also gripes that stolen guns are the bigger problem for law enforcement authorities. That may be true, but it's hardly a reason not to pass a one-gun law. In effect, the NRA seems to be saying a reasonable approach to limiting some gun violence is useless since you're not eliminating all of it.

Of course, such twisted arguments are hardly new for the NRA. Remember, this is the group whose members say the Brady bill's waiting period hurts more people than it helps, because folks who need guns right away to fend off bloodthirsty spouses are denied them. This is the group that opposes bans on Saturday night specials because such laws discriminate against poor people's right to cheap guns. The NRA's latest fund-raising letter offers new members a custom-molded replica of a Colt .45 "Silver Bullet" engraved with the signature of its president, Charlton Heston, whose "dignified heft" makes it the perfect key ring accessory. "When you hear it jingling proudly with your spare change," writes top NRA officer Wayne LaPierre, "you'll reach into your pocket and almost touch the fingertips of our Founding Fathers." "I remember when the Nazis forced Jews to wear yellow stars as identity badges," Heston once told an audience. "So what color star will they pin on gun owners' chests?"

Ultimately, the NRA's principled opposition to one-gun laws slides into pure libertarianism—in its most undiluted and antisocial form. After all, apart from gun collectors (whom the L.A. law exempts), why would anyone need more than one gun per month? "There are a lot of things in life you don't need," the NRA's Helsley told me. "You don't need two cars a month or three TVs a month. It's a question of freedom. If I'm a law-abiding citizen, why shouldn't I be able to buy as many guns as I want?"

Well, what about the fact that there's no illegal traffic in TVs that ends up killing people in L.A? Does the NRA really see no difference? "Absolutely not," Helsley says. "A year from now," he explains, "it might become one gun every two months, or one gun a year." "If the government can say 'one'—if they have that within their power," Wayne LaPierre told "60 Minutes" in December, "they can also say 'none.' "

The good news is that the one-gun movement is poised to spread nationally. Philadelphia Mayor Ed Rendell, for example, calls it a priority. New York Senator Charles Schumer, who pushed a federal one-gun bill unsuccessfully as a House member in 1997, says one-gun has a chance if the Democrats take the House back in 2000. He may be right. In the meantime, the NRA remains determined to invoke the Alamo, while Moses implausibly insists that a dozen guns a year are the first step on the road to serfdom.

MATTHEW MILLER is a syndicated columnist and cohost of "Left, Right & Center" on KCRW-FM in Santa Monica.

**Why Jordan will survive its king.**

# SUCCESSION SUCCESS

*By Asher Susser*

Jordanians are still trying to sort out the meaning of King Hussein's stunning decision to depose his brother and designated successor, former Crown Prince Hassan, in favor of Hussein's 37-year-old son Abdullah. The sudden change, as the king continues his struggle against cancer, has set off alarmist talk, in the Middle East and beyond, about an incipient threat to Jordan's political stability. Positioned between Israel and Iraq, between Syria and Saudi Arabia, and at the core of the Palestinian question, an unstable Jordan could have



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potentially horrendous consequences for the region as a whole. But treat the hype with caution: Jordan's history and contemporary geopolitics both suggest that the Hashemite regime will survive the transition.

To be sure, Hussein's decision does replace a 51-year-old man with decades of experience with a politically inexperienced 37-year-old British- and American-educated major general who until now was the head of the Jordanian army's special forces. Little is known of Abdullah's political views other than his public commitment to continuity in domestic and foreign affairs. His greatest asset is the support he enjoys in the armed forces and the security establishment. He is also being helped by Hassan's own remarkably noble and majestic acceptance of his brother's decision.

Abdullah is reputedly "a chip off the old block," in terms of his dynamic personality, intelligence, and charm. This is good news, since the survival of Jordan has always depended to a unique degree on the individual talents of its monarchs. Former King Abdullah, the founder of the state, and Hussein have been astute and pragmatic practitioners of the craft of politics and the art of diplomacy. Still, Jordan has never been just a one-man show. Its stability also hinges on the cohesion of the civilian and military elite—the "king's men"—who are motivated by self-interest in preserving their political patrimony; the loyalty of the armed forces and internal security establishment; and the interests of external powers resulting from Jordan's geopolitical centrality at the heart of the Fertile Crescent.

The historical record shows that these factors can combine to give Jordan's monarchy a surprising degree of resilience. In July 1951, King Abdullah was assassinated. His son and successor, King Talal, was mentally ill and abdicated in August 1952 to pave the way for Hussein. Since Hussein was then still a minor, the country was ruled by a regency council, composed of three senior politicians, until May 1953, when Hussein reached the age of 18 (according to the Muslim calendar; he was only 17 and a half according to the Gregorian calendar, having been born in November 1935). In the nine months between August and May, there was, in fact, no king in Jordan, as the young Hussein spent this period in England at the Sandhurst Royal Military College.

Between King Abdullah's sudden departure from the scene and Hussein's ascension to the throne, key figures in the elite and a number of more senior members of the royal family charted Jordan's course. Yet widespread predictions of imminent disintegration proved wrong. Jordan's neighbors did not devour the country, either. Advances by Iraq, even though it was then also ruled by a Hashemite monarchy, were firmly rebuffed by the Jordanian elite, which was jealously determined to preserve its own political independence. When the Iraqi Hashemites were overthrown in July 1958, Anthony Nutting, the former British minister of state for foreign affairs, observed, "However much one may admire the courage of this lonely young king [Hussein], it is difficult to avoid the conclusion [that] his days are numbered." More than 40 years have elapsed since then.

Today there is no shortage of able and experienced senior politicians and officers to guide Abdullah through the transition, as other "king's men" did in his grandfather's era. There are no noticeable chinks in the armor of the military or its loyalty to the existing order, and Abdullah's career in the armed forces stands him in good stead with this mainstay of the regime. Of Jordan's neighbors, Syria, which has a long record of subversive activities in Jordan, would be the most likely to try to exploit the present situation. But Jordan's security organs have been quite effective in contending with such interventions in the past, and there is no reason to assume that their efficiency has declined. Moreover, Jordan's external supporters, such as Israel and the United States, would probably not accept such Syrian (or Iraqi) meddling with equanimity.

As for domestic opposition, the Islamist movement in Jordan has been traditionally cautious in its dealings with the regime and has more often than not sought to achieve some form of modus vivendi. The Palestinians in Jordan, though a majority of the population, have no independent power base. For the most part, they are well-integrated into the economy and actually dominate the private sector.

Still, that economy is faltering, due to an imbalance between the country's growing population and its limited natural resources. Much of the society has endured declining living standards. In an unlikely worst-case scenario, Abdullah, contrary to expectations, would prove inept, and the royal family and the political and military elite, instead of compensating for the future king's shortcomings, would become involved in power struggles that filtered down to the army. Were such a scenario to become a reality, Jordan's external supporters could do little to prevent Jordan's unraveling.

Another issue of critical importance to Jordan will be the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. All the matters to be discussed in final status (borders, refugees, Jerusalem, and settlements, as well as other issues such as regional security and water) directly affect Jordanian interests in one way or another. Jordan has a vital interest in influencing the outcome of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. But, whereas his father is a seasoned veteran of these talks, Abdullah is untested as a third-party participant in Israeli-Palestinian wranglings.

Amid these uncertainties, then, stable transition in Jordan rests on the continued cohesion and determination of the elite and, beyond its borders, on the external powers that have shored it up in past times of trial. The United States, Israel, the Gulf states, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Europe might all have to be even more attentive and receptive than usual to Jordan's strategic, political, and economic requirements.

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**America's moral non-decline.**

# MORE MORAL

*By David Whitman*

By the time the Lewinsky scandal erupted, three out of four Americans already believed that moral values had weakened in the past quarter-century. Now, thanks to Bill Clinton's Oval Office high jinks, the case that moral standards are eroding seems stronger than ever. In his new bestseller *The Death of Outrage,* William Bennett argues that the lack of public outcry over the president's adultery and prevarication is but one more sign that people's "commitment to long-standing American ideals has been enervated." Al Gore would disagree with Bennett's analysis of Clinton, but he, too, believes that "there is indeed a spiritual crisis in modern civilization."

Yet, for all the bipartisan hand-wringing about moral decline, there is surprisingly little evidence that Americans *act* more immorally today than they did a quarter-century ago. In fact, just the opposite seems to be true—as even a few conservatives are beginning to concede. In the current issue of the right-leaning magazine *The American Enterprise,* editor-in-chief Karl Zinsmeister urges fellow conservatives not "to accuse the American people of becoming morally rotten. Especially when there exist abundant data suggesting that the residents of our land are actually becoming *less* morally rotten." It is still true, of course, that millions of citizens continue to err and sin, and that the culture now has a surfeit of coarseness, from noxious rap lyrics to the "Jerry Springer Show." But, if one looks beyond the anecdotes, the picture of how people behave is unexpectedly encouraging.

Compared with their predecessors of a quarter-century ago, Americans today are less likely to drink to excess, take drugs, rely on the dole, drive drunk, or knowingly evade paying taxes. They give more money to charity and spend as much or more time in church. And they are more likely than their predecessors to do good Samaritan work among the poor, sick, and elderly. Despite fears of random violence, FBI reports suggest that fewer people were murdered by strangers in 1997 (2,067) than in 1977 (about 2,500), even though the U.S. population grew by 47 million during that time. The dramatic drop in the number of Americans victimized by murder, burglary, and theft represents another well-known illustration of moral progress, but there are many more.

For example, Americans now donate significantly more money to charity than they did a generation ago, as Everett Carll Ladd, director of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, documents in a forthcoming book. Adjusted for inflation, Americans gave about $525 per adult to charity in 1996. That is 50 percent more than Americans on average donated in 1970 ($349) and roughly triple what people gave in 1950 ($179). Starting in 1977, pollsters also began regularly asking adults whether they were involved in charity or social services, such as helping the poor, the sick, or the elderly. The ranks of those participating roughly doubled from 26 percent in 1977 to 54 percent in 1995. Volunteer work by college students is up, too. In 1998, 74 percent of college freshmen had done volunteer work the preceding year, the highest such figure since researchers started tracking it in 1984.

Charity has often gone hand in hand with religion, so perhaps it is not surprising to learn that religious faith, too, is not in decline. On the contrary, America remains a deeply religious nation, with a reinvigorated evangelical movement. In 1997, the Gallup Poll replicated one of its earliest surveys on Americans' religious practices from 1947. The 50-year update found that the same percentage of Americans pray (90 percent), believe in God (96 percent), and attend church once a week. One of the few differences between the two eras was that Americans were actually more likely to give grace or give thanks aloud in 1997 than in 1947 (63 percent compared with 43 percent).

Both adults and teens are now as likely to belong to a church or synagogue as their counterparts were 25 years ago, and they attend religious services a bit more often. Two months ago, at the start of December, 42 percent of adults reported attending a service at a church or synagogue the previous week—a tad higher than the 40 percent or so who said they had attended services in 1972, 1950, and 1940. As the political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset writes in his book *American Exceptionalism,* "Religious affiliation and belief in America are much higher in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth, and have not decreased in the post-World War II era."

While everyone "knows" that cheating on tests has exploded in recent decades, the few studies that have looked at trends over time suggest a different picture. A 1996 analysis by Donald McCabe and Linda Klebe Trevino of Rutgers University at nine state universities did find that cheating on tests and exams increased significantly from 1963 to 1993. But serious cheating on written work, such as plagiarism and turning in work done by others, had declined slightly, leading the researchers to conclude that "the dramatic upsurge in cheating heralded by the media was not found."

Cheating on taxes also appears to be no worse than in the recent past. Since 1973, the Internal Revenue Service has tracked the "voluntary compliance rate," a figure used to describe the percentage of total tax liability that individuals and corporations pay voluntarily.



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In 1992, the voluntary compliance rate for the individual income tax was roughly 83 percent, a hair higher than in 1973.

As for another vice—drug use—Americans seem to be doing better, not worse. Use of illicit drugs peaked in 1979, when 14.1 percent of the population reported having used an illicit drug the previous month, more than double the 1997 figure of 6.4 percent. Cocaine use peaked in 1985; Americans were four times as likely to use cocaine then as they are today. The trends are similar among high school seniors (though marijuana use has risen since 1992).

At the same time, heavy alcohol consumption, binge drinking, and drunken driving have all declined. Heavy alcohol use—defined as having five or more drinks on the same occasion on each of five or more days in the previous month—is at its lowest point since 1985, when the federal government first started tracking the figure. In 1985, 8.3 percent of the population were heavy drinkers compared with 5.4 percent in 1997, a drop of about a third. The decline in drunken driving has been equally marked. In 1997, the number of people killed in alcohol-related crashes dropped to less than 40 percent of all traffic fatalities for the first time since the government started tracking this statistic in 1975. Americans consumed about as much alcohol per person in 1995 as in 1945—and drank substantially less than in 1970.

For all the talk of scandal, and despite the official statistics, political corruption seems to be waning, too. In 1996, 952 individuals were indicted in federal prosecutions for public corruption, more than triple the number in 1975. Yet most historians believe the apparent rise in corruption stems from the proliferation of special prosecutors and inspector generals, not from a real upsurge in unethical conduct. New disclosure rules, government intercessions in allegedly corrupt unions, a law enforcement crackdown on the mob, the disappearance of Tammany Hall-style urban political machines and "good-time Charlie" governors, and a more watchful press all seem to have reduced bribes, hush money, and other blatant types of political corruption. Even William Bennett concedes in *The Death of Outrage* that "in general, politics today is less corrupt than perhaps at any point in American history."

Granted, not all the news on the moral front is good. One institution that undeniably weakened in the past quarter-century is the family. Since the early '70s, out-of-wedlock childbearing has skyrocketed. Child abuse and neglect have risen, too—thanks mainly to the advent of crack—and most noncustodial parents still don't pay their child support.

Yet other much-lamented changes in family life do not really demonstrate a rise (or fall) in collective virtue. The surge in divorce suggests that Americans now lack a sense of commitment, but most divorced couples do not think they are acting immorally—more often, they think they have done the right thing by ending a troubled marriage. Many couples similarly defend cohabitation, once deemed to be "living in sin," as a sensible trial run at marriage.

Some moral behavior that has improved in the past quarter-century, particularly the reduction in criminality and drug-taking, is still worse today than it was in the 1950s. But, even when stacked up against the "good ol' days," there are plenty of signs of moral progress. In the 1950s, well over half of the nation's black population lived under almost apartheid-like conditions through much of the South. Millions of women faced sexual discrimination and were denied the right to pursue a calling of their own. Society treated the elderly shabbily, with more than one in three living in poverty (compared with one in ten today). The disabled faced blatant, ugly bigotry, as did homosexuals.

Why hasn't the news about moral progress reached the public? In part, the reason is that it is often thought that people were more moral in earlier eras. Back in 1939, a Gallup Poll showed that 62 percent of the population believed that Americans were happier and more contented in the horse-and-buggy days; a survey taken by Elmo Roper two years earlier found that half of the population felt religion was then losing its influence on American life as well.

But part of the explanation for the public disbelief is that Americans experience an "optimism gap." When members of the public voice distress about family breakdown they are almost always referring to other people's families. Yet the vast majority of citizens do not have serious moral qualms about themselves or their families. Surveys show that most people think they are more moral than the average American, and members of the public repeatedly describe their own families as happy ones with strong ties.

In 1997, *U.S. News & World Report* conducted a revealing survey of 1,000 adults who were asked to rate the chances that various celebrities would one day get into heaven. Topping the list of famous people bound for heaven was Mother Teresa, who had not yet died. Nearly 80 percent of those polled thought it likely that the Nobel Peace Prize winner would one day get her wings. But the survey's most startling finding was that the individuals voted most likely to get into heaven were, well, those being polled. Eighty-seven percent felt that they were heaven-bound, compared with 79 percent who thought the same of Mother Teresa.

Most Americans, in short, hold a generous opinion of their own morals, even while they remain acutely aware of others' failings. But, if Americans can convince themselves that they are bound for heaven, it may also be time to acknowledge that the rest of the nation is not making a beeline for purgatory.

DAVID WHITMAN is a senior writer at *U.S. News & World Report* and the author of *The Optimism Gap: The I'm OK–They're Not Syndrome and the Myth of American Decline* (Walker and Company).



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# PROVINCE OF DOOM

*By Kurt Schork*

Kosovo lay silent and sullen this past week, barely visible under blankets of freezing fog and wind-whipped snow. When the sun did break through on the Field of Blackbirds outside Pristina, it illuminated a landscape of epic decline. Cooling towers for antiquated electric generating plants belched plumes of sulfurous smoke; conveyor belts shuttled low-grade coal from open-pit mines to inefficient furnaces, clanking past rusting heaps of discarded machinery and 100-foot slag heaps. It was a fittingly apocalyptic backdrop for the last European war of the twentieth century.

Now and then, through the gloom, it was possible to glimpse the brooding monument erected to commemorate the legendary 1389 battle fought here, where Ottoman forces vanquished Serbian Prince Lazar, bringing an end to Serbia's medieval empire and ushering in 500 years of Islamic domination. That defeat, the most resonant moment in Serbian history, has haunted Serbs ever since. And last week—with separatist guerrillas of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) holed up in the nearby hills, biding their time—it was hard not to wonder whether this field, and others like it, might soon be the scene for another Serbian defeat.

Of course, that depends largely on the West, which, determined that any change in Kosovo's status must be peaceful and mutually agreed upon, last week took matters into its own hands. The six major powers of the Contact Group—the United States, Britain, France, Russia, Germany, and Italy—delivered an ultimatum to the Belgrade government and to ethnic Albanians on whose behalf the KLA fights: prepare for serious peace talks outside Paris on February 6 or face NATO attack. Britain, France, Germany, and Italy committed to deploy ground forces in Kosovo to seal any political deal reached by the parties. There was the tantalizing prospect that diplomacy, backed by a credible threat of military force, could yet prevent the wider Balkan war that has been a worry since Yugoslavia began its slow, violent disintegration ten years ago.

But the subject of the talks will be autonomy, not independence. And neither the Serbs, who make up ten percent of the two million population in Kosovo, nor the ethnic Albanians, who have suffered under Serbian rule for more than a decade, seem to like the notion. President Slobodan Milosevic of Serb-run Yugoslavia wants to retain as much control as possible. The ethnic Albanians want as little as possible to do with Serbian rule. Both sides wonder whether they might not win more on the battlefield than they could ever hope to gain in a conference room. Should the talks falter and Kosovo's simmering violence boil over into full-scale war, the international community would confront a familiar list of limited, highly unpalatable choices—as it has in the Balkans so many times before.

Western policy in the Balkans has been crisis-driven throughout the decade, first in Croatia, then in Bosnia, and now in Kosovo. Last June, NATO threatened air strikes if government security forces continued their assaults on ethnic Albanian villages in Kosovo. Belgrade, citing numerous provocations by the KLA, responded with a massive offensive that drove hundreds of thousands from their homes and devastated wide areas of the province. The offensive, which continued for months, had nearly run its course by the time NATO strikes were threatened again.

On October 13, Richard Holbrooke, Bill Clinton's special envoy to the region, used the NATO threat to patch together an eleventh-hour deal with Milosevic that bought time for more negotiations on a political solution. But the resulting cease-fire failed because the threat of force that lay behind it simply was not credible. Kosovo's combatants, sensing that NATO would not strike, flagrantly ignored their obligations under the agreement. Negotiations on autonomy limped along while Serbs were being kidnapped and murdered and ethnic Albanians slaughtered by the score.

Predictably, it was another alleged massacre—the shooting deaths of 45 ethnic Albanians by Serbian forces in the village of Racak on January 15—that sparked the current flurry of international activity. William Walker, an American diplomat who heads the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM), immediately condemned the killings as a massacre.

Yugoslav officials responded angrily, declaring that

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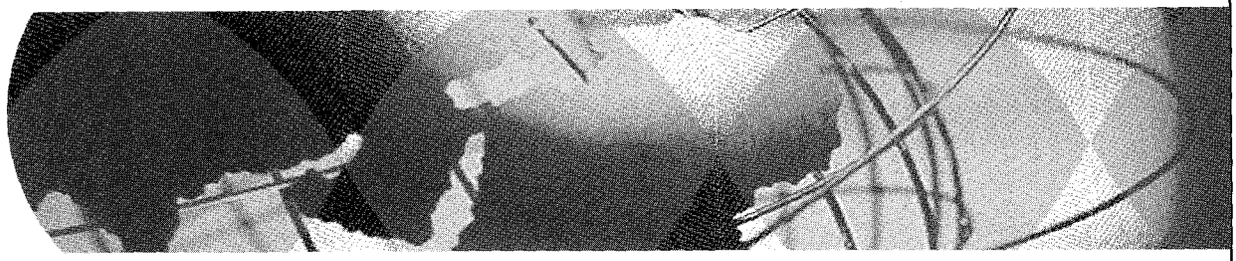

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the dead were "terrorists" and ordering Walker out of the country. The KVM chief repeated his massacre charge and ignored the injunction to leave, establishing a new axis of moral, if not yet political or military, authority in Kosovo. All this at Belgrade's expense. "The killings in Racak put a name and a face on the Serbian military buildup that had been going on despite the cease-fire agreement," says Veton Surroi, publisher of Kosovo's most widely read Albanian-language daily newspaper. "The massacre ... shattered the credibility of the cease-fire agreement and showed how fragile and inadequate the international intervention in Kosovo really was. Racak dramatized that OSCE verifiers could not protect anyone. They could observe a crime but not prevent it."

One did not have to accept either the Serbian or the ethnic Albanian version of events at Racak to realize that both sides, left to themselves, would rather fight than talk. Government security forces continued operations in the Podujevo area, north of Kosovo's capital, Pristina, in clear violation of the cease-fire. Tanks, artillery, and heavy machine-gun fire repeatedly raked KLA bunkers and trench lines. The guerrillas, armed mainly with Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades, responded as best they could.

On January 25, five ethnic Albanian civilians riding on a tractor and hay wagon were found shot dead under as-yet-unresolved circumstances. Three days later, just as the West was readying its Kosovo ultimatum, Serbian forces shot and killed 24 ethnic Albanian men in the village of Rogovo. Eleven bodies lay sprawled in a bullet-riddled red minivan. Others were stretched out on the muddy ground amid pools of congealed blood. Three of the men wore uniforms of the KLA. Serb police showed reporters a dozen weapons abandoned in the area. Another massacre? The unfortunate result of a legitimate police operation? Investigators took the bodies to the morgue in Pristina where forensic experts, including a team of Finns, were still at work on the victims from Racak.

Of course, ethnic Albanians had no monopoly on the grief here in recent days. A young Serbian policeman was killed in the Rogovo operation. Two others were wounded earlier in the week after intercepting a KLA column infiltrating Kosovo from neighboring Albania. A bomb tossed into a Serb-frequented café in the center of Pristina wounded seven people. The next night Zdravko Sedlarevic was killed and his wife was wounded when someone threw a hand grenade into their home in rural northwestern Kosovo. Both victims were Serbs. Absent a peace deal or forceful NATO intervention, this mayhem will continue and undoubtedly escalate come the spring.

Outnumbered nine-to-one by ethnic Albanians, members of Kosovo's dwindling Serb minority might be expected to welcome an international presence that would be obligated to protect their rights just as vigorously as those of the majority. But Serbs feel badly used by the peace process so far. Indeed, many insist the cease-fire has been a catastrophe.

Zoran Andjelkovic, president of Kosovo's governing Interim Executive Council and the highest ranking Serbian official in the province, says the exodus of Serbs has actually accelerated since the Holbrooke-Milosevic agreement. "What has happened here since October 15 has been a tragedy. Our police were forced to withdraw and international monitors were slow in arriving. KLA terrorists filled the vacuum, using murder and kidnapping to create a panic among Serbs, who fear for their lives," he told me.

Andjelkovic cited the December murder of the deputy mayor of Kosovo Polje and the kidnapping of five Serb civilians, including two women, near Vuciturn in January as the sorts of incidents that are destroying communal life here. "We blame the international community," he said. "NATO is used to pressure our police. The KLA interpret that as support. They are not a liberation movement. They are terrorists and criminals who don't hesitate to kill Albanians when it suits them.... If the international community had taken a stand against the KLA and allowed our police to finish their work there would be a real chance for peace."

That international pressure on Belgrade has sometimes worked to the advantage of the KLA and against Serb interests is indisputable. Consider the saga of Srbica, a small town 25 miles northwest of Pristina. When violence broke out in Kosovo a year ago this month in the village of Prekaz, just outside Srbica, government forces attacked what they termed a terrorist stronghold, killing about 50 people, half of them women and children, in the process. The offensive didn't entirely succeed, however, and the guerrillas were inundated with more recruits than they could train and equip. In response, Serbian security forces deployed en masse around Srbica, and ethnic Albanians fled—turning the place into a ghost town, but one in which the Serbs felt safe.

The Holbrooke-Milosevic cease-fire changed all that. Police positions and army firebases around Srbica have been dismantled and combat-ready forces withdrawn. The heavily fortified checkpoint south of town, where special police in battle helmets and flak jackets controlled the main route to Pristina for most of last year, is gone. Instead, standing just a few yards off the roadway last week were Kalashnikov-toting KLA soldiers looking for Serbs in the same way Serbian police used to look for them. Any Serb trying to head to Pristina from Srbica these days must go the long way, via Mitrovica, or risk abduction.

The cease-fire wasn't supposed to work to the advantage of either the government or the rebels, but the reality is that, wherever Belgrade withdrew, the KLA rushed in. Most of the 7,000 ethnic Albanians who lived in Srbica before the troubles have now returned, along with another 3,000 ethnic Albanian refugees. And the few hundred Serbs remaining in Srbica are more endangered now than they were when the



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rebellion began. Serbs seldom leave their homes after dark. Sixty fewer Serb students are attending elementary and high schools in Srbica than were enrolled last year. One year's high school class has just three Serbs.

Slavica Jaredic, the 46-year-old Serb president of Srbica municipality, said she feels she is living "perched on the edge of a volcano that could explode at any minute. The Serb population in the town and the entire municipality is dwindling, as it has been for years. We worry if there will be a next generation here. We have lost twenty of seventy Serb families in this town over the past year. We are such a small, tightly knit community that every person who leaves is deeply missed. Every departure is like a death in the family."

The Serbs' position in Srbica reflects their predicament across the whole of Kosovo. Serb out-migration and an ethnic Albanian birthrate that is the highest in Europe are combining to undermine Serbia's grip on Kosovo just as surely as guerrilla attacks and Western intervention. Even if the security situation somehow is resolved, there will still be the political control of jobs, education, and services to fight over. "We would accept autonomy for Kosovo where all citizens are equal, but not the kind where Albanians have all the power just because they are the majority," said one of Jaredic's Serb assistants.

It doesn't help that the autonomy that Kosovar Albanians enjoyed between 1974 and 1989 left a bad taste in the mouths of Serbs who saw it as a particularly egregious example of how they were supposedly disadvantaged by Tito's "strong Yugoslavia, weak Serbia" policy. "In those days the Albanians had priority in terms of municipal employment and factory jobs, and many Serbs with university degrees had to leave the area," Jaredic said. "They couldn't get work despite superior qualifications. If they were lucky enough to get jobs they often had bosses who did not have the necessary education for their position, which they held simply because they were Albanian. Also, they had priority in housing. We were Serbs living in Serbia, and yet we were second-class citizens. I could never, never go back to those days."

Nowadays, of course, Kosovar Albanians complain of exactly the same sort of discrimination at Serbian hands in the ten years since they lost autonomy. And, thanks to the KLA, they may have a chance to regain the whip hand Serbs currently have.

More rumored than real a year ago, the Kosovo Liberation Army has pulled off a remarkable feat. It has yet to win a battle of any consequence, and, as recently as a few months ago, American officials were denouncing its soldiers as terrorists. Yet now the KLA is a major participant in the negotiating process.

Still, in Washington and European capitals there is considerable skepticism over whether the KLA is organized and disciplined enough to be a reliable partner in the peace process. A deal that might be good for Kosovo and ethnic Albanians could threaten the very raison d'être of KLA forces still in the process of forming up. Even if federal Yugoslav, Serbian, and ethnic Albanian leaders, including KLA representatives, do sit down together in France, the question remains whether there is any solution that could appeal to guerrillas who have been fighting and dying for independence.

Are top KLA military commanders willing to contemplate disbanding their forces on the strength of Western promises of autonomy? Armed separatists certainly will not be permitted to roam the countryside if NATO ground forces deploy in Kosovo. Would it be possible or desirable to fold substantial numbers of KLA soldiers into a reconstituted Kosovo police force reflecting the ethnic split here? Even some ethnic Albanian leaders closely identified with the struggle for independence worry that opening such a door might unintentionally convert the KLA into a political police force inimical to the development of democratic institutions.

Should the peace talks falter, NATO air strikes could certainly damage Yugoslav army and Serbian police positions and might even shake President Milosevic's grip on power. But it would be harder for NATO to punish the KLA, whose low-tech insurgency presents far fewer and widely dispersed targets.

Threats to cut the KLA's funding, which flows from the ethnic Albanian diaspora in Europe and the United States, and to seal the border between northern Albania and Kosovo have proven easier to make than to fulfill. And, while Serbian security forces have come in for most of the public criticism in Kosovo, it is still the KLA, whose growing confidence and military muscle lie beyond the control of any civilian authority—including ethnic Albanian political leaders—that most worries the West over the long term.

Christopher Hill, the U.S. ambassador to Macedonia and Holbrooke's partner in the Dayton peace process, has been spearheading the drive for a negotiated settlement in Kosovo for months. He chafes at the notion that the West has failed here already: "Kosovo is a problem that didn't just come up in the last year when the bloodshed began, or even in the last ten years after Kosovo lost its autonomy. This is a problem straight out of the 1912 Balkan wars. The Serbs took Kosovo from the Ottoman Empire. The Albanians never suited up for it, and they've objected ever since. It's not an easy issue. In a sense it is a land shared by both Albanians and Serbs. We're going to have to find a way through this, but it will be a difficult and dangerous passage."

Has the West got it right this time in the Balkans? If so, it will have taken only a year to achieve in Kosovo the sort of breakthrough that took 43 months in Bosnia. If not, NATO's scheduled fiftieth anniversary celebration in Washington in April likely will occur against a backdrop of ethnic bloodshed and diplomatic dithering with somber implications for Europe and the United States. •



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**The Iranian theocracy's fear of females.**

# THE VEILED THREAT

*By Azar Nafisi*

I would like to begin with a painting. It is Edgar Degas's *Dancers Practicing at the Bar,* as reproduced in an artbook recently published in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Under the heading "Spatial Organization," the book gives a two-paragraph explanation of Degas's placement of the ballerinas: "The two major forms are crowded into the upper right quadrant of the painting, leaving the rest of the canvas as openspace...."

So far, everything seems normal. But, like most things in Iran today, it is not. Upon closer inspection, there is something disturbingly wrong with the illustration accompanying this description, something that makes both the painting and the serious tone of its discussion absurdly unreal: the ballerinas, you see, have been airbrushed out. Instead, what meet the eye are an empty space, the floor, the blank wall, and the bar. Like so many other images of women in Iran, the ballerinas have been censored.

Of course, the irony is that, by removing the dancers, the censors have succeeded only in making them the focus of our attention. Through their absence, the dancers are rendered glaringly present. In this way, Degas's painting is emblematic of a basic paradox of life in Iran, on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. On the one hand, the ruling Islamic regime has succeeded in completely repressing Iranian women. Women are forbidden to go out in public unless they are covered by clothing that conceals everything but their hands and faces. At all government institutions, universities, and airports, there are separate entrances for women, where they are searched for lipstick and other weapons of mass destruction. No infraction is too small to escape notice. At the university where I used to teach, one woman was penalized for "laughter of a giggling kind." And, just recently, a female professor was expelled because her wrist had shown from under her sleeve while she was writing on the blackboard.

Yet, while these measures are meant to render women invisible and powerless, they are paradoxically making women tremendously visible and powerful. By attempting to control and shape every aspect of women's lives—and by staking its legitimacy on the Iranian people's supposed desire for this control—the regime has unwittingly handed women a powerful weapon: every private act or gesture in defiance of official rules is now a strong political statement. Meanwhile, because the regime's extreme regulation of women's lives necessarily intrudes on the private lives of men as well (whose every interaction with women is closely governed), the regime has alienated not just women but many men who initially supported the revolution.

This tension between the Islamic ruling elite and Iranian society at large has been vastly underestimated by Western observers of Iran. In part this is because, over the past 20 years, American analysts and academics, as well as the Iranian exile community, have had little or no access to Iran. Thus they have relied unduly on the image presented by Iran's ruling clerics.

At present that image is one of increased openness—as symbolized by the election of the moderate cleric Mohammed Khatami to the presidency back in 1997. Recently, for example, CNN cheerfully informed us that, after 20 years, the Islamic Republic has begun to show Hollywood movies. What CNN failed to mention was that Iranian television's version of, for example, *Mary Poppins* showed less than 45 minutes of the actual film. All portions featuring women dancing or singing were cut out and instead described by an Iranian narrator. In *Popeye,* all scenes involving Olive Oyl, whose person and whose relationship with Popeye are considered lewd, were excised from the cartoon. Meanwhile, even as the regime purports to have softened its hostile stance toward the United States, it has not softened the punishment meted out to Iranians who dare show an interest in American culture. In fact, soon after he was appointed, Khatami's new education minister issued a new directive forbidding students to bring material bearing the Latin alphabet or other "decadent Western symbols" to class.

However, these are just the mildest examples of the many ways in which the new openness that characterizes Khatami's rule has been accompanied by increased repression. The brief spring that followed his victory—

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during which freedom of speech flourished in public demonstrations and new newspapers—was brought to an end with an abrupt crackdown. The government has since banned most of the new papers and harassed or jailed their editors. (They have since been released.) Many of the progressive clergymen who took advantage of the opening to protest the current legal system were also arrested and, in one case, defrocked. The regime has also taken the opportunity to clamp down on members of Iran's Bahai minority.

Meanwhile, the parliament has passed two of the most reactionary laws on women in the republic's history. The first requires that all medical facilities be segregated by sex. The second effectively bans publication of women's pictures on the cover of magazines as well as any form of writing that "creates conflict between the sexes and is opposed to the Islamic laws."

This past fall, two nationalist opposition leaders, Daryush and Parvaneh Forouhar, were murdered, and three prominent writers disappeared. All three were later found dead. Many Iranians were outraged, and tens of thousands attended the Forouhars' funeral in a tacit protest. The government's initial response gave these Iranians some reason for hope. President Khatami condemned the killings and set up a committee to investigate them. The committee's first conclusion was that those responsible were members of the Information Ministry. However, within days, the committee was proffering a different story, alleging that, on second thought, the murderers were just part of a rogue group within the ministry and that the killings were not political. The committee also has yet to name the killers—much less bring them to justice. Furious, Iranians have flooded the progressive newspapers with angry calls and letters.

To the extent that the Western media have taken note of such incidents, they have mainly cast them as the symptoms of a struggle between the moderate Khatami and his reactionary fellow clerics. More often than not, the media portray acts of repression as measures taken by the hard-liners against Khatami—as if he, and not the people who were actually murdered or oppressed, was the real victim.

This simplistic portrayal of Khatami versus the hard-liners completely misunderstands the current situation in Iran. Khatami does not represent the opposition in Iran—and he cannot. True, in order to win a popular mandate he had to present an agenda for tearing down some of the fundamental pillars of the Islamic Republic. But in order to even be eligible for election he had to have impeccable political and religious credentials. In other words, he had to be, and clearly is, committed to upholding the very ideology his constituents so vehemently oppose.

Khatami's tenure, then, has revealed the key dilemma facing the Islamic regime. In order to maintain the people's support, the government must reform, but it cannot reform without negating itself. The result has been a kind of chaos, a period marked by the arbitrariness of its events. One day a new freedom is granted; the next day an old freedom is rescinded. Both events are symptoms of the deep struggle under way in Iran today, not just between Khatami and the reactionary clerics, but between the people of Iran and all representatives of the government. And at the center of this struggle is the battle over women's rights.

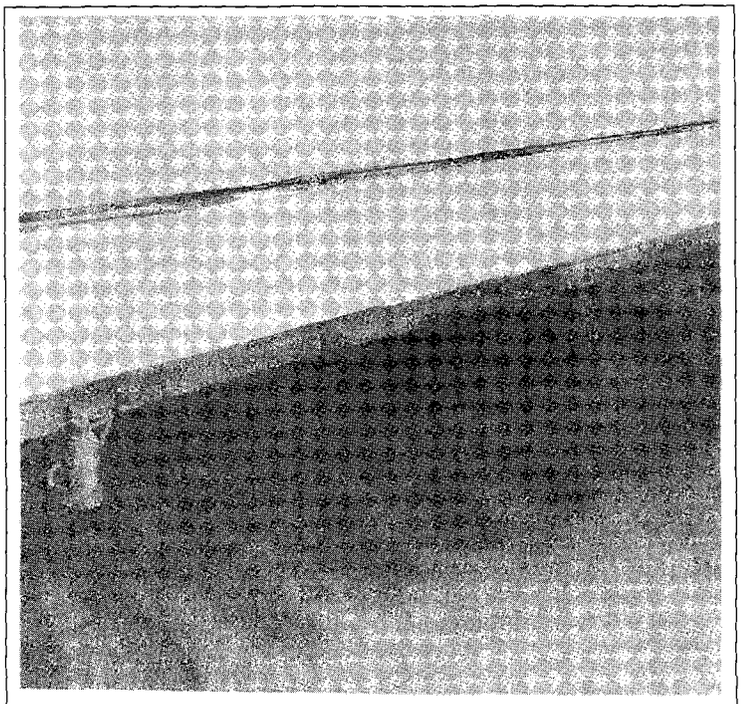

**Figure 5-4.** Edgar Degas. *Dancers Practicing at the Barre.* 1877. Oil, freely mixed with turpentine, on canvas; $29\frac{3}{4} \times 32$". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

DEGAS, ACCORDING TO IRANIAN CENSORS.

A second image comes to mind—a woman from the past, Dr. Farokhroo Parsa. Like the ballerinas, her presence is felt through her absence. I try to conjure her in my mind's eye. Parsa had given up her medical practice to become the principal of the girls' school in Tehran I attended as a teenager. Slowly her pudgy, stern face looms before me, just as it did when she used to stand outside the school inspecting the students as we entered the building. Her smile was always accompanied by the shadow of a frown, as if she were afraid that we would take advantage of that smile and betray the vision she had created for her school. That vision, her life's goal, was for us, her girls, to be "truly" educated. Under the Shah, Parsa rose to become one of the first Iranian women to be elected to the Iranian parliament, and then, in 1968, she became Iran's first female Cabinet minister, in charge of higher education. In that post Parsa tried not only to raise the quality of education but to purge the school textbooks of sexist images of women.

When the Shah was ousted in 1979 by a diverse group



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of opposition figures that included Muslim clerics, leftists, and nationalists, Parsa was one of the many high functionaries of the previous government whom the revolutionaries summarily tried and executed. At her trial she was charged with "corruption on earth," "warring against God," and "expansion of prostitution." She was allowed no defense attorney and was sentenced by hooded judges.

At the time, the new revolutionary regime took a great deal of pride in its executions, even advertising them and printing pictures of its victims in the newspapers afterward. But Parsa's photograph was never published. Even more exceptional, in that exceptional time, was the manner of her death. Before being killed she was put in a sack. The only logic behind such an act could be the claim that Islam forbade a man to touch the body of a woman, even during her death. There is some debate about the method of her execution. Some say she was beaten, others that she was stoned, still others that she was machine-gunned. Nonetheless, the central image of her murder remains the same: that of a living, breathing woman made shapeless, formless, in order to preserve the "virtue" and "dignity" of her executioners.

I had not thought of Parsa for many years until the news of her execution resurrected her in my memory. Since then, time and again, I have tried to imagine her moment of death. But, while I can see her living face with its smile and frown, I cannot envision her features at the specific moment when that smile and frown forever disappeared in that dark sack. Could she have divined how, not long afterward, her students and her students' students would also be made shapeless and invisible not in death but in life?

For this, on a broader scale, is precisely what the clerics have done to all Iranian women. Almost immediately upon seizing power, Ayatollah Khomeini began taking back women's hard-won rights. He justified his actions by claiming that he was actually *restoring* women's dignity and *rescuing* them from the degrading and dangerous ideas that been *imposed* on them by Western imperialists and their agents, among which he included the Shah.

In making this claim, the Islamic regime not only robbed Iran's women of their rights; it robbed them of their history. For the true story of women's liberation in Iran is not that of an outside imperialist force imposing alien ideas, or—as even some opponents of the Islamic regime contend—that of a benevolent Shah bestowing rights upon his passive female subjects. No, the advent of women's liberation in Iran was the result of a homegrown struggle on the part of Iranian women themselves for the creation of a modern nation—a fight that reached back more than a century. At every step of the way, scores of women, unassuming, without much sense of the magnitude of their pioneering roles, had created new spaces, the spaces my generation and I had taken for granted. This is not to say that Iranian women—including those of my own generation—never made mistakes, never wavered in their commitment to freedom. But the fact that Iran's women were fallible does not change the fact that so many of them were vital leaders in Iran's long struggle for modernization.

Probably the first of these leaders was a poet who lived in the middle of the last century, a woman named Tahereh who was said to be stunningly beautiful. At the time, Iran was ruled by the despotic and semi-feudal Qajar dynasty, whose reign was supported by fundamentalist Muslim clerics. The alliance between the mullahs and the despotic regime prompted various groups to begin questioning the basic tenets of Islam. One such group were the Babis—a dissident movement of Islamic thinkers who were the precursors to the Bahais—who eventually broke with Islam to create a new religion, and who are the victims of vicious persecution by the Iranian government to this day. Tahereh was one of the Babis' most effective leaders. She was among the first to demand that religion be modernized. She debated her ideas with men and took the unprecedented step of leaving her husband and children in order to tour the country preaching her ideas. Tahereh was also the first woman to unveil publicly. Perhaps not surprisingly, she paid for her views with her life. In 1852, she was secretly taken to a garden and strangled. Her body was thrown into a well. She was 36.

As Iran began to have increasing contact with the West, many sectors of the population—intellectuals, minorities, clerics, and even ordinary people—became increasingly aware of their nation's backwardness as compared to the West. From the mid-nineteenth century these forces continually struggled with Iran's rulers over the degree to which Iran should close the gap by modernizing itself. By 1908, this struggle had come to a head, with the ruling Shah threatening to undermine the constitution that the modernizers had forced his predecessor to agree to accept in 1906. The new Shah soon began bombarding the parliament.

Once again, women were at the forefront. Many of them actually fought in the violent skirmishes that ensued, sometimes disguised as men. They even marched to the parliament, carrying weapons under their veils and, once inside, demanded that the men holed up there hand over the jobs if they could not protect the constitution.

The constitutionalists prevailed, and, although the constitution contained no language advancing women's rights, the next 20 years saw significant progress in this area thanks to the determined efforts of countless women. Leafing through the books about the women's movements from this era, one is amazed at their members' courage and daring. So many names and images crowd the pages of these books. I pick one at random: Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, daughter of a learned and religious man from an old and highly respected family, who was the editor of a monthly journal for women. In the 1910s she was beaten and detained for three months for establishing a girls' school in Isfahan. One can only guess the degree of her rage and resentment against her adversaries by her will, in which she proclaimed: "I will never



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forgive women who visit my grave veiled." It was only appropriate that those who murdered Farokhroo Parsa should also not tolerate Dowlatabadi, even in her death. In August 1980, Islamic vigilantes demolished her tomb and the tombs of her father and brother who, although men of religion, had supported her activities.

It was an American, Morgan Shuster, who best appreciated the efforts of Iranian women during Dowlatabadi's period. "The Persian women since 1907 had become almost at a bound the most progressive, not to say radical, in the world," he wrote in his 1912 book *The Strangling of Persia*. "That this statement upsets the ideas of centuries makes no difference. It is the fact."

As part of their push toward modernization, the women of Iran also supported a general movement in favor of greater cultural pluralism. Writers and poets led heated and exciting debates on the need to change the old modes of artistic and literary expression, with many calling for a "democratization" of the Persian language. New literary and artistic forms were introduced to Iran.

The reactionary elements in the clerical ranks and other supporters of despotism rightly recognized that the ideas in these cultural products represented a threat to their dominance and immediately attacked them as "poisonous vapors" coming from the West to destroy the minds of Iranian youth. To the mullahs the idea of women's rights fell in the same category—and they opposed them in the same breath. Two prominent clerics, Sheikh Fazolah Nuri and Sayyid 'Ali Shushtari—mentors of Ayatollah Khomeini—even issued a fatwa against women's education.

But the charge that Iran's women's rights activists—and the modernizers in general—were agents of the West is patently unjust. To be sure, they were keenly interested in bringing in Western ideas. But this desire stemmed from their acute awareness of Iran's shortcomings and their belief that Iran's road to independence and prosperity lay in understanding and internalizing the best of the Western systems of government and thought. It also meant fighting back when the Western nations began brutally exploiting Iran's wealth and natural resources. And Iranian women were at the forefront of this battle—for instance, organizing a large-scale boycott of foreign textiles in favor of Iranian-manufactured products and frequently demonstrating in support of national independence. In fact, it is safe to say that, more than any other group, women, the same women who were several decades later demonized as the agents of imperialism, symbolized the nationalistic and anti-imperialist mood of those times.

Over the ensuing years, the modernizers gained ground. Whatever else might be said about him, Shah Reza Pahlevi, who came to power in 1925, was a committed modernizer who in 1936 even attempted to mandate that all women cease wearing veils. When this failed due to popular outrage, he worked to encourage unveiling in other ways. His son, Shah Muhammad Reza, who was in power at the time of the 1979 revolution, continued in this tradition—for example, granting women the right to vote in 1963. (Of course, it should be remembered that, contrary to the claims of both the Shahs and the clerics who opposed them, these actions merely ratified the progress that had been achieved by Iranian women themselves. Long before the mandatory unveiling law was imposed and long after that law was annulled, scores of Iranian women chose to throw off their veils of their own volition.)

By 1979, women were active in all areas of life in Iran. The number of girls attending schools was on the rise. The number of female candidates for the universities had risen sevenfold during the first half of the 1970s. Women were encouraged to participate in areas normally closed to them through a quota system that gave preferential treatment to eligible girls. Women were scholars, police officers, judges, pilots, and engineers—active in every field except the clergy. In 1978, 333 of 1,660 candidates for local councils were women. Twenty-two were elected to the parliament; two to the Senate. There were one female Cabinet minister, three sub-Cabinet undersecretaries (including the second-highest ranking officials in the Ministries of Labor and Mines and Industries), one governor, one ambassador, and five mayors.

That Khomeini ousted them by resorting to the clergy's old tactic of accusing them of betraying Iranian culture and tradition was not surprising. What was surprising was that the leftist members of his revolutionary coalition went along. The leftists had traditionally appeared to support women's rights. However, this support never ran very deep. The leftists operated under a totalitarian mindset that was ultimately far more at ease with the rigid rules espoused by the reactionary clerics than with the pluralistic approach favored by the women's movement. Thus, when the Ayatollah began his crackdown, he had the leftists' full support.

Most Iranian women, on the other hand, were not so pliant. Another image surfaces—this one a photograph that appeared in an American magazine, I can't remember which. I found it recently among the scraps I had kept from the early days of the revolution. It was taken on a snowy day in March 1979 and reveals tens of thousands of shouting women massed into one of Tehran's wide avenues. Their expressions are arresting, but that is not what is most striking about this photo. No, what draws my attention is how, in contrast to today's pictures of women in Iran—depressing images of drab figures cloaked in black cloth—this photograph is filled with color! The women are dressed in different shades—vibrant reds, bright blues—almost as if they had purposely tried to make themselves stand out as much as possible. In fact, perhaps this was their objective, because, on that March day, these women had gathered to express their resistance to—and their outrage at—Ayatollah Khomeini's attempt to make them invisible.

Some days prior, the Ayatollah had launched the first phase of his clampdown on women's rights. First, he had announced the annulment of the Family Protection Law



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that had, since 1967, helped women work outside the home and given them more rights in their marriages. In its place, the traditional Islamic law, known as *Sharia*, would apply. In one fell swoop the Ayatollah had set Iran back nearly a century. Under the new system, the age of consent for girls has been changed from 18 to nine. Yet no woman no matter what age can marry for the first time without the consent of her father, and no married woman can leave the country without her husband's written and notarized consent. Adultery is punishable by stoning. On the witness stand it takes the testimony of two women to equal that of one man. If a Muslim man kills a Muslim woman and is then sentenced to death, her family must first pay him compensation for his life. As if all this were not enough, Khomeini also announced the reimposition of the veil—decreeing that no woman could go to work unless she is fully covered.

The March 8 demonstration began as a commemoration of the International Day of the Woman. But, as hundreds of women poured into the streets of Tehran, its character spontaneously changed into a full-fledged protest march against the new regime's measures. "Freedom is neither Eastern nor Western; it is global," the women shouted. "Down with the reactionaries! Tyranny in any form is condemned!"

The March 8 event led to further protests. On the third day, a huge demonstration took place in front of the Ministry of Justice. Declarations of support from different associations and organizations were read, and an eight-point manifesto was issued. Among other things, it called for gender equality in all areas of public and private life as well as a guarantee of fundamental freedoms for both men and women. It also demanded that "the decision over women's clothing, which is determined by custom and the exigencies of geographical location, should be left to women."

In the face of such widespread protest, the Ayatollah backed down. His son-in-law emerged to say that Khomeini had merely meant to encourage women to dress "respectably" in the workplace. But the Ayatollah's retreat proved only temporary. Even as he was officially relenting on his proclamation on the veil, his vigilantes continued to attack unveiled women in public—often by throwing acid at them. And the Ayatollah soon proceeded to reinstate the veiling laws—this time taking care to move step by step. In the summer of 1980, his regime made the veil mandatory in government offices. Later, it prohibited women from shopping without a veil. As they had before, many women resisted and protested these acts. And, once again, they were attacked and beaten by government goons and denounced by the leftist "progressive" forces. Later, the veil was made mandatory for all women regardless of their religion, creed, or nationality. By the early '80s, and after much violence, the regime had succeeded in making the veil the uniform of all Iranian women.

Yet, even as it enabled the regime to consolidate its control over every aspect of its subjects' lives, this act firmly established the separation between the regime and the Iranian population. In order to implement its new laws, the regime created special vice squads that patrol the cities on the lookout for any citizen guilty of a "moral offense." The guards are allowed to raid not just public places but private homes, in search of alcoholic drinks, "decadent" music or videos, people playing cards, sexually mixed parties, or unveiled women. Those arrested go to special courts and jails. The result was that ordinary Iranian citizens—both men and women—immediately began to feel the presence and intervention of the state in their most private daily affairs. These officers were not there to arrest criminals who threatened the lives or safety of the populace; they were there to control the populace, to take people away, and to flog and imprison them. Bazaars and shopping malls were surrounded and raided; young girls and boys were arrested for walking together in the streets, for not wearing the proper clothing. Nail polish and Reebok shoes were treated as lethal weapons. Young girls were subjected to virginity tests. Soon, even people who originally supported the regime began to question it.

The government had claimed that only a handful of "Westernized" women had opposed its laws, but now, 20 years after the revolution, its most outspoken and daring opponents are the very children of revolution, many of whom were the most active members of Islamic students' associations. To cite just one statistic, of the 802 men and women the vice squads detained in Tehran in July 1993, 80 percent were under the age of 20. The suppression of culture in the name of defending against the West's "cultural invasion" and the attempts at coercive "Islamization" have made these youths almost obsessed with the culture they are being deprived of.

The regime has also succeeded in alienating many of the traditionalist women who had initially supported it. Committed religious believers, these women had long felt uncomfortable with the modernization and secularization that had taken place in Iran during the century leading up to the revolution. So, when Ayatollah Khomeini first arrived on the scene, they welcomed him with open arms. So powerful an ally were they that Khomeini, who had vehemently protested when women were granted the right to vote in 1963, decided against repealing it so that he could rely on these women's votes.

After the revolution, these women began to venture into the workplace—which they now deemed sufficiently hospitable to their traditionalist lifestyle. There they encountered those secular women who had not been a part of the Shah's government and who had therefore been allowed to remain in their jobs so that the regime could benefit from their know-how. As time went by, the traditionalist women began to find that they actually had quite a lot in common with their secular counterparts, who they had previously criticized as Westernized. The line between "us" and "them" gradually blurred.

One issue that solidified this bond was the law. For some traditional women, the imposition of the veil was an affront to their religiosity—changing what had been



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a freely chosen expression of religious faith into a rote act imposed on them by the state. My grandmother was one such woman. An intensely religious woman who never parted with her chador, she was nonetheless outraged at those who had defiled her religion by using violence to impose their interpretation of it on her grandchildren. "This is not Islam!" she would insist.

Meanwhile, other traditional women felt alienated by some of the more draconian aspects of *Sharia.* The debate around the Islamic laws inevitably led to a critical reappraisal of the basic tenets that had created them. It also led to a discussion of more fundamental issues pertaining to the nature of male-female relations as well as public and private spaces. The regime had changed the laws, claiming that they were unjust, that they were products of alien rule and exploitation. Now that the "alien rulers" were gone, these claims were being tested. Iranian women from all walks of life were discovering that the biggest affront to them was the law itself. It did not protect the most basic rights of women; it violated them. As Zahra Rahnavard, the wife of the last Iranian Prime Minister Mir Hossein Musavi and an ardent Islamist, has lamented to the Iranian press: "The Islamic government has lost the war on the *hejab* [veil].... The Islamic values have failed to protect women and to win their support."

The incompatibility of these laws with the reality of modern Iran thus became apparent to the more open-minded elements that had previously supported the regime. Many of them distanced themselves from the official policies and joined ranks with those on the "other" side. The transformation of the editor and part of the staff of an official women's journal, *Zan-e Rooz,* is a good example. They left office in the mid-'80s and created a new magazine, *Zanan,* sharply critical of many government policies and practices. They invited secular women to participate in the publication of their journal. Some from the ranks of clergy joined them in criticizing the existing laws on women. Such transformations have frightened the hard-liners into passing even more reactionary laws, further suppressing the progressive elements working for creation of a civil society and, in the process, fueling a vicious cycle.

The consequence has been that the regime has become far more dependent on women for its survival than women are on the regime. The regime can make all sorts of deals with the imperialist powers, even with the Great Satan itself, but it cannot allow its women to change the public image imposed on them: since the regime's legitimacy rests so heavily on the notion that its rules represent the will of the Iranian people, the presence of even one unveiled woman in the streets has become more dangerous than the grenades of an underground opposition. And Iranian women appear to have taken notice. Young girls in particular have turned the veil into an instrument of protest. They wear it in attractive and provocative ways. They leave part of their hair showing from under their scarves or allow colorful clothing to show underneath their uniforms. They walk in a defiant manner. And in doing so they have become a constant reminder to the ruling elite that it is fighting a losing battle.

I would like to end with a final image—this one a joyous one that negates the other mutilated half-images of women I have described. It happened in 1997, when the Iranian soccer team defeated Australia in the World Cup qualifying tournament. The government had repeatedly warned against any secular-style celebrations. But, as soon as the game was over, millions of Iranians spilled into the streets, dancing and singing to loud music. They called it the "football revolution." The most striking feature of this "revolution" was the presence of thousands of women who broke through police barricades to enter the football stadium, from which they are normally banned. Some even celebrated by taking off their veils. Time and again I replay not the actions but the atmosphere of jubilation and defiance surrounding this event. The Iranian nation, having no political or national symbols or events to celebrate as its own, chose the most nonpolitical of all events, soccer, and turned it into a strong political statement.

As usual, the Western press described these events as a message to the hard-liners from Khatami's supporters. But the main addressees of the football revolution's message were not the hard-liners; they had heard the message many times before and had ignored it. If anyone were to learn any lessons from this event it should have been the more "moderate" faction. It was clear then, and it has become clearer since thanks to subsequent demonstrations, protest meetings, and publications, that the majority of Iranians see the current Islamic regime as the main obstacle to the creation of a civil society.

It is this problem that faces President Khatami today. He has impressed the West by proclaiming himself a man who stands for the rule of law. But the law in the Islamic Republic is what most Iranians today are protesting against. In reaction the hard-liners have become increasingly repressive; the small openings and freedoms enjoyed by the Iranian people at the start of President Khatami's victory have come with arbitrary crackdowns in which ordinary citizens are stoned for adultery; writers and prominent members of the opposition are not only jailed but murdered; Bahais are deprived of their most basic human rights; and the revolutionary guards and morality police treat the Iranian citizens as strictly as ever.

But these actions are taken from a position of weakness, not strength. Unlike in the past, repressive measures have failed to quell the protests. Side by side with the daily struggle that has turned the business of living into a protracted war, there are public debates, protest meetings, and demonstrations, reminders of those sunny-snowy days 20 years ago. And, just as in those days past, women are once again playing a decisive role.

In fact, there is an almost artistic symmetry to the way Iranian women at the end of the twentieth century, as at its beginning, are at the center of the larger struggle for the creation of an open and pluralistic society in Iran. The future twists and turns of this struggle are uncertain, but of one thing I am sure: a time will come when the Degas ballerinas return to their rightful place. •



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# BOOKS & The Arts

## *Stanley Kauffmann on Films*

### Small People

Columbia Pictures, the distributor of **Gloria**, scheduled no advance press screenings for it in New York so that critics would not see it before it opened in theaters. This is a dire sign, indicating that the distributor has no confidence in the picture, is forced to open it, but wishes it could just slide by to the video shelves. The advance buzz on this film—advance buzz is plentiful on most films, especially turkeys—was sad. Then *Gloria* opened. The distributor and the buzz were, in some degree, mistaken.

The screenplay, the cinematography, the directing, and the casting are only partly awry. The screenplay by Steven Antin is a rewrite of the John Cassavetes script for the 1980 film of the same name and is, admittedly, wearily trite in most of its characterizations. A lot of gangsters are involved, and we know what each one is going to say before he says it. The plot is a cobbled contraption. Gloria is an ex-con, who was a gang chief's moll and who comes back to collect money that he owes her. The chief bilks her. She discovers a small boy who, for plot reasons, the gang wants to rub out. Again for plot reasons, she steals the boy and flees with him around Manhattan with the gang on their trail, furious. Naturally, affection develops between Gloria and the child. Still, hokey as the story is, there are some bright touches. For instance, at one point Gloria takes this Latino boy to a leafy lovely Catholic school outside New York for safety, exactly the kind of *religioso* place that would have brought tears to the eyes of the juvenile Mickey Rooney. This kid hates the place and can't wait to get out of there.

The cinematography, by the English master, David Watkin, whose work has been superb all the way from *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968) to *Night Falls on Manhattan* (1997), doesn't add much to the way we would have looked at most of these Manhattan vistas on our own, but there are, among other moments, some two-room shots where activity in a near and a far room is kept lucid.

Sidney Lumet, now 74, directed, and the first question is why he bothered. Worse: having decided to make this Damon Runyonesque story far from his usual urban realism, Lumet then let some of the minor scenes sag, without the sense in his earlier films that every split-second of screen time has been made to pay off. But he did accomplish some things here, especially with his actors.

This aspect, too, is only partly good: Lumet uses Jeremy Northam as the gang chief, an actor of no menace and no sex. On the other hand, Lumet has worked out a good minor role for the aging George C. Scott, as an elder-statesman crook, a role in which Scott can be seated almost all the time and can thus concentrate his energies on what he is saying. Seated, Scott is still a force.

And Lumet has Sharon Stone as Gloria. Stone has blazed with verity ever since *Year of the Gun*. I happened to see *Casino* again recently on TV—the last third of it, anyway—and was again struck by the power with which Stone sustained anger from scene to scene. In *Gloria* she has to sustain a good deal more than anger at quite a high pitch through the whole film, and she never wavers into cliché; it's always Gloria. Surely Lumet, distinguished as a director of acting, must have been of help here. A pity that what he and Stone achieved is trapped in this otherwise negligible film.

One more note. The production design, by Mel Bourne, has its oddities. Gloria's former apartment, now the gang headquarters, looks like an almost stripped warehouse, and has a pool table on a huge dais. This was her home? Strange.

Still, *Gloria* deserved better than it got.

I had to discuss *Gloria* because of Lumet and Stone. But also I had just seen **The Children of Heaven** (Miramax), an Iranian film that centers on a small brother and sister, and I was struck by the difference in these Tehran children from the coeval New York boy in *Gloria*.

Some of the best Iranian films of recent years have dealt with children, *Where Is the Friend's Home?* and *The White Balloon* among them. It's common knowledge that children have often been used as subjects in Iran because filmmakers there can deal with them honestly without running into censorship. Well, it's an ill wind. Several of these films were lovely.

Majid Majidi wrote and directed *The Children of Heaven* with the same quiet grace and reticence that has marked his compatriots' work. The story stretches simplicity about as far as it can go and still survive. In Tehran a little boy loses his younger sister's sneakers, and since the family can't afford to replace them, the two children share one pair of

### FILMS WORTH SEEING

**Affliction.** *Outbreaks of hot violence in wintry New England. Nick Nolte, as a rural cop, contends stirringly with his macho heritage. (Reviewed 2/1/99)* **Dr. Akagi.** *A country doctor in Japan toward the end of World War II. Shohei Imamura's directing is once again rough-edged but affecting. (2/8/99)* **Dry Cleaning.** *A long-married couple, shopkeepers in provincial France, have their sex lives perturbed by a young visitor. Acute—except for the ending. (2/15/99)* **Shakespeare in Love.** *Fun. High romance and low comedy in London, 1593. (1/4&11/99)*—**SK**



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sneakers according to their own carefully devised plan. The climax is a race in which the boy is out to win a pair of sneakers. But what fascinates much more than the story is the way in which the two children are drawn.

Small children are, of course, mirrors of their parents and their immediate society. The boy in *Gloria,* who was brought up in a loving home, not a criminal nest, is nonetheless one more wised-up, precocious American movie kid who can banter with grown-ups. The brother and sister in *Children* are certainly not angelic, but they reflect a grave and winning decorum in their parents and their community. Allow for the strong possibility that both the American and the Iranian children have been in some degree devised to please domestic audiences, and it's still an interesting contrast.

The press notes for *Children* include quotations on the subject of children from a documentary about ten Iranian filmmakers. Two of these men say that they have stopped making films about children, that more variety is now possible, but all of them agree that, intrinsically, making films about children was less a restriction than an opportunity. "You can only find the hope and passion for life in children," says one man. These directors may have been making the best of a straitened situation; nonetheless, if children in a modern American film behaved like these Iranian children, we would all be doubled up with disbelief. •

# *Jed Perl on Art*

## Ecstasy

As the greatest paintings and sculptures age, shedding in the process much of the context out of which they were born, they enter the realm of once-upon-a-time, of magic. If the work is naturalistic, the passage of decades and centuries can give a dreaminess to subjects that the artist's contemporaries knew first-hand, and this underscores the teeter-tottering pressure between verisimilitude and fantasy that is the key to any transcendent realist achievement. If the artist originally set out to create images with a fairy-tale feeling or an otherworldly aspect, the very fading of the social universe that gave birth to these visions can have a purifying, almost an abstracting, effect. This, I think, is what has happened to the work of Gianlorenzo Bernini, who created what is surely Europe's supreme art of desires and surprises. Much of Bernini's achievement involved a brilliantly plotted celebration of the papal politics and Counter-Reformation faith of seventeenth-century Rome; and the not-quite-of-this-world spell that was spun by this supreme master of startling, show-stopping, ecstatic effects only takes on an added dizzying freedom once the world that supported his work is gone.

Bernini's grandest statues, chapels, fountains, and buildings have a peremptory impact that we may be inclined to associate more with natural wonders than with works of art. Coming upon the Four Rivers Fountain in the Piazza Navona in Rome, with its deliriously concise union of ancient obelisk, grotto-like base, splashing water, and wildly gesticulating stone figures, even visitors who have never heard of Bernini and instinctively avoid the roiling, over-the-top sensibilities of Baroque art will find themselves slipping into the mood of this greatest of seventeenth-century Italian artists. I expect that Bernini would be delighted that so many people who while away an evening eating delicious, sky-high expensive ice cream in the Piazza Navona regard the Four Rivers Fountain not as a thing unto itself, but as one of the elements that, like marvelous weather, or a surprise encounter with a friend from back home, goes to make up a peerless urban experience.

In the Four Rivers Fountain—and in so many of the other works with which he left his stamp on Rome, including the piazza of St. Peter's and the bronze Baldacchino that marks the site of St. Peter's grave inside, and the chapel in Santa Maria della Vittoria dedicated to St. Teresa, and the chapel in San Francesco a Ripa devoted to the Blessed Ludovica Albertoni—Bernini is swept along and buoyed up by the tastes, the attitudes, and the rhythms of the place. The relationship that he almost invariably establishes between a fountain and a piazza—in the Piazza Navona, or with the Triton fountain in the Piazza Barberini—depends on the deepest possible feelings for the way that people move through urban space. The scale of these works is determined by some mysterious intuitive calculus, which is a matter of pressures and counterpressures, of movement transforming mass. In the end, however, there is this divine obviousness.

Bernini was born on December 7, 1598, and the year or so around the four hundredth anniversary of this event has occasioned exhibitions in Rome, Edinburgh, and Cambridge, Massachusetts; a traveling show of Italian Baroque terracottas from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg that has been seen in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington; and a number of new books. In Rome, where the major focus of current preservation and conservation efforts is the upcoming celebration of the millennium, and Bernini's grandest achievements are monuments that you can see any time, his birthday appears to have been something to be taken in stride. And why not? Bernini's contribution to the city is so enormous—so much a part of the fabric of Rome and even of Europe—that his work is basically immune to the vagaries of taste, and an upturn of interest can seem as beside the point as a downturn.

Scholars will tell you that Bernini's exuberant sensibility was eclipsed in the century after his death, as Neoclassical ideas came to dominate European art, in the French Academy and in the theories propounded by Reynolds in England and Winckelmann in Germany. Yet Bernini's art has the kind of full-bodied expressiveness that will probably influence artists even when theory has gone its own way. Straight through the eighteenth century, certainly, you feel his impact in the animated style of so much Rococo portraiture; in the late Baroque altarpieces of Austria and Germany; in the design of the Trevi Fountain in Rome, created in the 1730s by Lambert-Sigisbert Adam, possibly after an idea that goes back to Bernini; and in the work of Augustin Pajou, the last great royal sculptor of France, whose drawings after Bernini's Tomb of Urban VIII were included in the exhibition of his work mounted at the Louvre and the Metropolitan last winter.

Sacheverell Sitwell—who, with his brother Osbert, spearheaded a Baroque revival in England in the 1920s, and generally deserves to be taken more seriously as an analyst of the arts—was on to something when he wrote that Bernini had so fully expressed and "put into being his own potentialities that he left behind him more of finished fact than influence, or paths for others after him to follow and pick up." Another way of putting this might be that Bernini's



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impact is so general and pervasive as to be in some sense incalculable, or at least susceptible to only the most indirect and penetrating analysis. Certainly, he has proven to be an enormously fertile subject for art historians, whose explorations of architectural substructures, archival material, and lost iconographic and metaphoric meanings can parallel the way that a geologist uses fossils and soil samples to understand the apparently seamless beauty of an Alpine peak. While art history is a field as compromised by simplistic theory and politicized thinking as any field in academia, the past decade has in fact been a glorious time for Bernini studies. Shelley Karen Perlove's *Bernini and the Idealization of Death* (Pennsylvania State University Press), about the *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*, and T.A. Marder's *Bernini's Scala Regia at the Vatican Palace* (Cambridge University Press) are detailed monographic studies which deal masterfully with broader cultural questions. They deserve the kind of general scholarly audience that, two decades ago, looked to Irving Lavin's *Bernini and the Unity of the Visual Arts*, with its penetrating discussion of *St. Teresa* and the Cornaro Chapel.

In Bernini's art, the relationship between inspiration, gestation, and completion is fascinatingly enigmatic. Bernini's preparatory drawings, many of which exist, have a scratch-pad informality. These drawings are bolts from the blue. We see what is happening, but we don't see where the effects come from, and we can barely guess at Bernini's way of building on these awesome preliminaries. The experience is very different from looking at, say, the drawings of Rubens, a seventeenth-century artist who had a feeling for fervent emotions not unlike Bernini's. With Rubens, you can see the elaboration and enrichment of ideas, step by step, all the way to the complete vision of his paintings. By contrast, Bernini's early study for the writhing figure of the *Blessed Ludovica* is a scribble of drapery, little more. The development that leads from this sketch, which is like a first dramatic crack of lightning, to the storm-tossed marble statue in the Altieri Chapel is virtually impossible to trace.

On another one of these preliminary sheets—which, like the *Ludovica* study, is in the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig—Bernini has laid out twenty individual studies for the Four Rivers Fountain. Here, working mostly in pen-and-ink, Bernini evinces a rough-hewn assurance. He lines up ideas and tosses them this way and that. He considers the exact shape of the fountain's grotto-like base and the best way to support the great obelisk that crowns this elaborate allegorical representation of the waters that flow through the far-flung corners of the world. Yet these pared-down sketches are so much acts of imagination and conceptualization, and so little matters of craft in any normative sense, that they may only deepen the mystery of the fountain's evolution. The drawings are so awesomely intuitive that they achieve, paradoxically, a weird impersonality. You can see why the early biographers of the great Renaissance and Baroque artists tended to describe these talents in terms of divine intervention. Bernini's studies for the Four Rivers Fountain are as close as we are ever going to come to seeing the doodlings of the Gods.

In 1981, a year after the three hundredth anniversary of Bernini's death, Irving Lavin, the dean of Bernini scholars, mounted a show of drawings from Leipzig in Princeton (which traveled to five other American venues). I regret

# ART SCENES *galleries, exhibits, and events*

**ROBERT MILLER GALLERY** 41 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, 212-980-5454. Tuesday - Saturday 10 AM - 6 PM. *Jennifer Bartlett: Rhapsody* (wall installation) through March 16; *Lee Krasner: The Little Image - The Large Canvas (From the Late Forties to Early Sixties)* February 9th - March 13th, 1999.

**O.K. HARRIS WORKS OF ART** 383 West Broadway, New York, NY, 212-431-3600, fax: 212-925-4797. February 13 - March 13, 1999: *James Del Grosso*, paintings; *Edo Rosenberg*, sculpture; *Elenore Weber*, paintings; *David Jelinek*, sculpture; *Louis Nitka*, drawings.

**BROOKE ALEXANDER EDITIONS** 59 Wooster Street, New York, NY 10012, 212-925-4338, fax: 212-941-9565, e-mail: brookealex@earthlink.net. Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM. March 6th - April 24th: *Markus Raetz: Double.* New Editions available: Uta Barth, Carroll Dunham, Charles Long, Jorge Pardo, Richard Tuttle, Nicola Tyson, Franz West, Raymond Pettitbon.

**GALLERY TARANTO** 39 West 14th Street, New York, NY 10011, 212-691-6070. Monday through Friday, 9 AM - 7 PM, Saturday 11 AM - 5 PM. January 14 - February 20, 1999: *Breaths of Life*, eleven photographers meet the team of Action Against Hunger. Contact: Lorena La Grassa for more information.

**THE PARKS GALLERY** 140 Kit Carson, Taos, NM 87571, 505-751-0343. Website: www.arttaos.com. After a ten year absence from the commercial gallery scene, acclaimed artist Bruce Lowney unveils new lithographs and paintings. Call for photos.

**LEICA GALLERY** 670 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10012, 212-777-3051. Tuesday through Friday, 11 AM - 6 PM; Saturday 12 NOON - 6 PM. Main Gallery: *Franz Hubmann: Café Hawelka/ Vintage Prints* and *Erika Hubatschek: Austrian Pastorals: 1939-1945.* Oskar Barnack Room: *Günter Osterloh: Ocean Views.* Both shows run through February 20.

**JULIE SAUL GALLERY** 560 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10012, 212-431-0747, fax: 212-925-3491. March 4th - April 10th: *Eve Fowler: Portraits.* Portraits of women athletes involved in male sports, young men who work as hustlers in NYC, and still lives made in her apartment. In April: *John Patrick Salisbury.*

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that nothing like this was organized for the present anniversary. The drawings, so often startlingly reduced, and with a use of pen-and-ink and chalk that is almost unnervingly brusque, are among the hidden wonders of European art. Their casualness is not unique to Bernini, to be sure; the catalog of the 1981 show includes reproductions of drawings by Taddeo Zuccaro and Francesco Furini that are equally concise. Still, as the students of Lavin's who wrote the catalog are quick to point out, what is merely off-the-cuff in other Baroque artists takes on a new kind of power in Bernini.

Bernini seems to regard a figure not in terms of anatomy, but as a whole form, a whole force, a gestalt. His lines do not construct a three-dimensional illusion in the way that we expect of Renaissance and Baroque drawings. Bernini uses the very pressure of line against paper to express depth and weight, light and shade. In certain respects, his drawings recall those of Rembrandt and Poussin (two artists whose working lives paralleled his, and who also moved from Baroque complexity to an increasingly classicizing expression); but Bernini's relation to the page has a freedom that is his alone. Lavin, in the 1981 catalog, connects the shocking incisiveness of Bernini's draftsmanship to his interest in caricature, an art form of which he was a founding father. Surely the notion of telling us everything we need to know about a person in a couple of lines is related to the rapid-fire expressionism of everything that this master ever did.

When I look at Bernini's drawings, it is Cézanne who often comes to mind. I see resemblances in the spontaneous design of the page, the instinct for the power of blank space, the sense of the line as molding and even as carving up the page. Cézanne, who admired Baroque subjects and did at least one drawing after Bernini, surely would not have minded the comparison, but this is not a matter of borrowings or echoes so much as some deeper, intuitive affinity. For Bernini, as for Cézanne, the paper was a surface so super-sensitive that it could absorb the subtlest, most telegraphic emotions. Casualness is given a new kind of weight.

Filippo Baldinucci, who published the first biography of Bernini in 1682, two years after the artist's death, already speaks of the boldness of the drawings; and while art historians will point to inaccuracies in Baldinucci's work, broadly speaking, this wonderful study tells us just about everything that we need to know. Baldinucci never met Bernini, but he was able to give us a vivid impression of this artist who lived so much in the public eye. The immediacy of Baldinucci's portrait surely owes much to Queen Christina of Sweden, who commissioned this biography of the artist with whom she had become friends after she converted to Catholicism, abdicated her throne, and went to spend the rest of her life in Rome.

Bernini's easy-going relationships with Queen Christina and other monarchs, princes, and popes help to explain the amazing agility with which he moved through Rome's treacherous papal court. Baldinucci describes the huge pleasure that great figures felt in simply speaking to Bernini—he writes that "during the dinner hour [Pope Urban VIII] used to have pleasant conversation with [Bernini] till it was time to retire"—and you feel the kind of eye-to-eye involvement that Bernini could establish with grand figures in the immediate informality of his portraits of Cardinal Scipione Borghese and Urban VIII. Bernini does not penetrate to a person's depths the way Velázquez does, but then Velázquez's approach is very much that of a servant and an onlooker, whose insights have a subversive power. The pleasure of Bernini's portraits is that they are friend-to-friend.

The times of Bernini's life were also the times of the city. Last summer the Borghese Gallery, built by Cardinal Scipione Borghese, Bernini's first great patron, was the site for a show—*Bernini Scultore: La Nascita del Barocco in Casa Borghese*—that added to the house's already incalculable holdings enough works to flesh out the picture of his early years. From the Metropolitan Museum came the delicious *Faun Teased by Putti*, done before he was twenty; and there was also the *St. Sebastian* from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Foundation and the *St. Lawrence* from the Pitti Palace.

The Borghese is a temple to Bernini's hot prodigious youth, containing as it does the statues of Pluto raping Persephone, of Apollo in pursuit of Daphne, and of David in the very act of aiming his slingshot at Goliath. The more statesmanlike genius—one might say, the impersonal genius—of Bernini's maturity is reflected in his contributions to the wider landscape of Rome, in fountains and piazzas and chapels, and above all in St. Peter's, where he left his stamp on the interior, with its Baldacchino and Cathedra Petri and tombs of Urban VIII and Alexander VII, as well as on the design of the piazza. Then there are the more urgently personal avowals of Bernini's later years—the portrait of Gabriele Fonseca in San Lorenzo in Lucina, and the *Blessed Ludovica* in San Francesco a Ripa—which take us away from the yellow shimmer of the papal sun and achieve a different kind of expression, a dim luster.

The greatest masters go head to head with the masters of the past. But Bernini goes head to head with the entire experience of Rome: with its classical sculpture and architecture; with its Early Christian fervor; with its High Renaissance intellectuality; with the very rhythms of its piazzas. Bernini sustains this dialogue with the city so perfectly that some of his greatest works set off correspondences and echoes that go way beyond the visual arts. The smiling angel that pierces St. Teresa with an arrow in the Cornaro Chapel is not only the most beautiful angel in Baroque art, it is also the most beautiful face in the entire city of Rome.

Baldinucci quotes Bernini as explaining that "those who do not sometimes go outside the rules never go beyond them." He was a synthesizer: the first, as Baldinucci observes, "to attempt to unite architecture with sculpture and painting in such a manner that together they make a beautiful whole." What finally comes through Baldinucci's pages is a portrait of the sanest genius who ever lived—a pragmatic, can-do personality, a fundamentally happy man. He was absolutely self-assured, but he also knew how to dissect his own work mercilessly. He had a superhuman ease and facility, but he was not alienated from rudimentary, rock-bottom feelings. He had balance; and as an artist, he balanced in the empyrean. As he got older, his tastes grew ascetic. He developed a more austere visual opulence. Living in papal Rome just past the zenith of its power, he experienced pomp and circumstance as natural matters—as things to be taken in stride.

In the United States this year, the central Bernini event is the beautiful new installation at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard of its extraordinary collection of more than a dozen terracottas. This group, the best single collection of these three-dimensional sketches and models in the world, was purchased by the Fogg in 1937, and as an ensemble it almost surely originally derives from the artist's estate. For many years shunted off in corners and hallways of the museum, the collection has now been beautifully installed in a single room. The only objection that one can make is that the lighting is a bit too low.

The Fogg collection contains a wide range of types of terracottas, from a beautifully finished model that was



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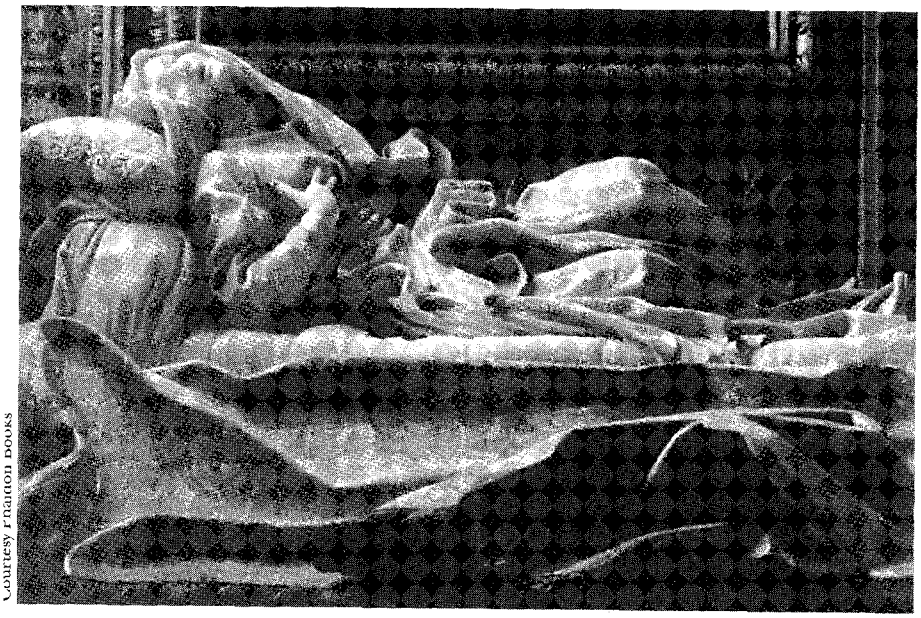
probably done with a good deal of studio assistance and meant to be presented to a patron, all the way back to the rough, summary studies that suggest first ideas and appear to come almost entirely from the artist's own hand. These most informal terracottas take the brevity of the drawings into the third dimension. The sense of an artist summoning up volumes is so palpable—and these volumes remain so deliciously not-quite-resolved—that a visitor can feel a kind of bemused unease. Terracotta is an ancient medium (the Fogg installation includes several Greek examples), and in the Rococo century after Bernini's death this easily worked medium became a staple for elegant decorations in drawing rooms all over Europe; but nobody before or since Bernini has given this extraordinarily fluid medium such a hell-bent lyric certainty.



Courtesy Phaidon Books

BERNINI, *BLESSED LUDOVICA ALBERTONI*, 1674

Bernini's pats, dashes, and dabs of clay, as well as his angular, abrupt incisions and scratches with tools and even fingernails, give us a zooming, hurry-up view of the human figure. By emphasizing flow-through over the particularity of detail in the articulation, or the near anti-articulation, of facial features and anatomical details, he gives clay an atmospheric (some might say an almost impressionistic) quality. Yet Bernini's attack is so restless, it is so much a search for the big movement and the definitive image, that we never feel that he is particularly interested in the nearly painterly effects that he achieves. Bernini's terracottas are fascinating precisely because they are so utterly without charm. This is what distinguishes them from other great terracottas—from, say, those by the eighteenth-century sculptor Canova. The hugeness of Bernini's imagination unsettles the clay. He gives these small works a disquieting monumental scale. He seems to be asking of the terracotta a force, a ferocity, that threatens to tear the medium apart. (Some of the terracottas—the one in the Victoria and Albert of the *Blessed Ludovica*, for example—broke up during firing.) These are works that feel bigger than they have any business feeling.

Establishing the authenticity of a particular terracotta is no easy matter. When we look at these works that were created in the studio of an artist who employed significant numbers of assistants, many of whom were themselves artists of consequence, it can be difficult—really impossible—to definitively say who did what. Nothing, basically, is signed. The hand of a master may be there in works done by the shop. Few if any of these works can actually be traced back to the studio. These problems were the subject of a conference last spring in Cambridge, and many of the conclusions presented there will be published in an upcoming issue of the Harvard University Art Museums bulletin. Among the strategies for attribution suggested by the Fogg conservators are an investigation of the clay that Bernini used and where it originated, and a program to photograph and study the fingerprints on the terracottas, with the hope that one can literally trace Bernini's hand. While these lines of inquiry have their interest, there haven't been any revelations, and we are left with the ineffable judgments of the eye, which in the case of the Fogg terracottas seem to suggest that the museum owns what it says it owns.

Would that I could say the same of the terracottas from the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, which have toured America with labels and catalog entries so wildly optimistic that the results amount to a museological fraud. The Hermitage show, in which Bernini is a star player but by no means the single center of attention, represents a fraction of a large collection of terracottas that came to Russia around 1800. There is a significant representation of work by Alessandro Algardi, the sculptor who was Bernini's chief rival for papal attention in seventeenth-century Rome, and practiced a more temperate and naturalistic style. But in this anniversary year it is the Berninis that make the greatest appeal to the public; indeed, in Chicago and Washington, the show was called "Bernini's Rome." Although there are a few studies of angels and one for the Constantine statue that seem to be autograph works, the terracottas that probably make the most immediate claim on our attention—they include works related to the *St. Teresa* and the *Blessed Ludovica*—have a rather curious relationship with the most securely attributed terracottas.

The Hermitage *St. Teresa* and *Blessed Ludovica* have a finicky surfeit of detail that suggests Rococo porcelain more than anything by Bernini. Of course, these fully finished images cannot be compared with the working studies, such as the angels in this show. Still, even if you compare the Hermitage *St. Teresa* with the magnificently finished *St. Longinus* in the Fogg (which in any event Harvard currently believes may include studio assistance), it is clear that there is a loss of overall power and an over-refinement about the surfaces that has nothing to do with Bernini, even at his most polished.

The trouble with the Hermitage show is that questionable works are presented as irrefutable—not Bernini with a question mark, but flat-out Bernini. And in the catalog entries, by Sergei Androsov and Nina Kosareva of the Hermitage, almost perjuriously optimistic attributions are further embellished. In the case of the *Blessed Ludovica*, negative attributions are glanced over, and the one terracotta that is generally accepted, which is in the Victoria and Albert, is left for the end, where it is irrelevantly said to be "recently acquired" and its condition is exaggeratedly described as "unfortunately poor." Of the *St. Teresa*, Androsov and Kosareva observe that the generally negative reactions to this terracotta are due to "the poor reproductions of the group." Viewed first-hand, however, it seems even less plausible. As for the *Ludovica*, Shelley Karen Perlove, in her book on the Altieri Chapel, makes it clear in her acknowledgements that she has seen the Hermitage terracotta—and



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then rejects it in a footnote, as "lacking the freshness of an autograph" work.

This exhibition does not give museumgoers any sense of how questionable these attributions are. There is not much that we can do about the wishful thinking of the curators at the Hermitage, but I do have to wonder if the three major American museums that have opened their doors to this show—the Art Institute of Chicago, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the National Gallery in Washington, D.C.—are doing right by their audience. The casual museumgoer may hardly care if something is by Bernini or Algardi. Scholars will make up their own minds. But the serious nonspecialist visitor, who may really be trying to understand, is left in the lurch. A great artist is being misrepresented here, and thoughtful visitors will be perfectly justified in wondering, as they leave, if Bernini is really so remarkable. How could they guess that the very sculptures that have disappointed them are not only not by Bernini, but may even have been done decades after his death?

The Fogg conservators' scheme to establish a complete set of Bernini's fingerprints has yielded only one or two prints that experts regard as legible, yet there is something about this Sherlock Holmes attempt, however quixotic, that jibes with our desire to get in tune with the scintillating physicality of Bernini's work. To think about exactly how Bernini pushed or dug the clay with his fingers—to want to literally see those fingers—is only natural in the case of an artist who created so many hands that grab at and grapple with the world. I think of the fingers of Pluto, pressing into Persephone's flesh; of the fingers of Daphne, turning into twigs and leaves; of St. Longinus, whose fully extended left hand completes the flung-out gesture of his arms; of St. Teresa, with her lifeless fingers; of the Blessed Ludovica, who clutches her enormous hands to her breast.

There is no artist with a more sophisticated feeling for the mobility of the human figure. Bernini's triumphs as an architect are owed not least to this kinetic sophistication, for he regards spaces as force fields that are activated, stabilized, destabilized, and restabilized by the men and women who move through them. Like so many of the artists of the Renaissance and Baroque, Bernini was involved in the theater. One of the most famous contemporary observations about the artist was John Evelyn's remark in his diary that "Bernini ... gave a public opera wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues, invented the engines, composed the music, writ the comedy, and built the theater." Bernini used the conceit of a proscenium arch to frame both the *Blessed Ludovica* in the Altieri Chapel and the *St. Teresa* in the Cornaro Chapel, where he carries the metaphor further by setting members of the donor's family in what look like opera boxes. (A study for one of these boxes is among the most fascinating terracottas at the Fogg.) Still, Bernini's dramatic sense has less to do with space as it is plotted on a stage that we watch from a safe distance than with space that we shape as we are moving through it. When Bernini considers the pageantry of St. Peter's, he conceives of the papacy and the public as acting upon one another, with a plasticity that is not unlike the give of Persephone's flesh under the pressure of Pluto's fingers.

Eleanor Clark, in *Rome and a Villa*, her remarkable salute to the city after World War II, refers to the piazza of St. Peter's as a "splendidly reasonable" piece of architecture. In Bernini, form follows function, just so long as you understand that the function is to give papal life the absolute in ritualistic dazzle. T.A. Marders's fine new monograph on the Scala Regia, the stairs that connect St. Peter's to the pope's palace, is a thrilling scholarly exploration of a work of Bernini's that has never been open to the public. (If you are lucky, you can catch a glimpse of the very beginning of the stairs, when the doors at the far right of St. Peter's portico, which open onto Bernini's statue of Constantine on horseback, happen to be open.) In the Scala Regia, Bernini gave a cramped space a false perspective that cunningly made the stairway feel grander and deeper than it was. Marder shows the Scala Regia as a complex passage between public and private realms, which becomes "a theater for stylized behavior that was intended to authenticate papal power according to a seemingly endless variety of scripts offered by liturgy and ceremonial, and enacted through ritual."

Marder's later chapters have a kind of dazzle that is difficult to summarize, coming as it does from the painstaking scholarly accretion of historical detail. He is especially good on the ambitions of Alexander VII, who commissioned the stairs and, perhaps because he was old and infirm, wanted architecture to give an especially powerful enclosing structure for papal ritual. Marder goes into the iconography of Emperor Constantine, to whom Alexander looked for ancient images of papal power. He also discusses the importance of the Corpus Christi festival. The fascination of this kind of art history is that it gives us all the details of a fairy tale whose general outlines we grasp, almost immediately, in the very look of the space. We are talking about real lives, and real politics; but one of the marvels of Bernini's art is that he allows us to experience seventeenth-century realities as an aura that is given off by his art.

In one of the most beautiful rooms in the Borghese Gallery exhibition, some half a dozen of Bernini's small, youthful self-portraits in oil were juxtaposed with the *David*, to whom Bernini gave his own features. Bernini was a dashingly handsome young man, and in the oil studies, which approach the vivid gorgeousness of heads by Velázquez, you feel the artist's unself-conscious delight in his own erotic powers. Looking at those dark, fearless eyes, I am reminded of the eyes in the self-portraits of Picasso, another dazzling young man, who also cut quite a figure as a ladies' man. (And who, incidentally, also had a father who was an artist.)

Bernini's stormy relations with his mistress Costanza Bonarelli are the stuff of myth; and when the pope advised him to settle down, the girl he married was reputedly the most beautiful in Rome. Like Picasso, Bernini was a charismatically attractive man who felt comfortable with the beauty of women, and perhaps this goes a ways toward explaining why it is that his most profound explorations of the human heart are set in the hearts of women. In the *St. Teresa* and the *Blessed Ludovica*, he seems to inhabit these great women of faith, and their ecstatic feeling for God becomes his, too. In the art of Titian and Rubens, you feel a tremendous admiration for the radiance of a beautiful woman. Bernini goes further. He lives inside that radiance.

Bernini was the last European artist to create a transcendent art that exists entirely outside of the museums. In his grandest projects, he established a relationship with Rome that recalls that of Phidias with Athens and Gislebertus with Autun. To come upon one of the essential Berninis is to discover not just a work of art, but a space, a place; and in the months around this anniversary, the place where this feeling has probably been the strongest is in the quiet interior of the church of San Francesco a Ripa in Trastevere, where Bernini designed the Altieri chapel, which contains the statue of the Blessed Ludovica.

If the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria is



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Bernini's ebulliently middle-aged view of the human encounter with God, the *Blessed Ludovica* is the old man's one-last-time meditation, a more subdued and perhaps even more penetrating experience. Like Michelangelo, who influenced Bernini in so many ways, Bernini became increasingly religious as he grew older, with a feeling for the ascetic and a distaste for visual extravagance. There is a rejection of easy virtuosity in the Altieri Chapel that recalls not only the old Michelangelo but also the old Tolstoy, a yearning for an ultimate simplicity, a doubt about the trickery of art. In the Altieri Chapel, which he completed in 1674, Bernini took his last long journey as an artist.

Ludovica Albertoni was a child of the Trastevere aristocracy who, after the death of her husband, devoted her life to the care of the poor. She died in 1533, at the age of sixty. In her monograph on the Chapel, Shelley Karen Perlove discusses the cult that grew up around Ludovica, who became a sort of aristocratic-populist hero in sixteenth-century Trastevere. She was beatified by Pope Clement X in 1671. Her simplicity is something that you feel immediately in the Altieri Chapel, where Bernini has left the austere sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century architecture, including two old frescoes, in place. One of Bernini's secrets had always been an essential, devastating simplicity, which is at work even in the gorgeously elaborate Cornaro Chapel, where the dozens of colored stone panels are juxtaposed with the absolute whiteness of the figures of St. Teresa and the angel. In the Altieri Chapel, though, the materials are utterly reduced. There is some of the clarity and the concentration that we associate with Gregorian chant.

Set above and beyond the altar, in a great niche, the Blessed Ludovica lies on the bed on which she will die, a woman who echoes all the recumbent figures of ancient and medieval art even as she transforms their eerie mortuary peacefulness into an agitated subterranean drama. Her figure is disturbed yet muffled, as if we were sensing churning waters miles beneath the surface of a storm-tossed sea. The statue is illuminated by a gently filtered light. A painting of the Virgin and Child with Saint Anne that hangs behind the Blessed Ludovica is a dim vibrating presence, set in gold panels and ornamented with angels' heads.

Scholars disagree as to whether Bernini has represented the day before the Blessed Ludovica's death, when she fell into an ecstatic trance, or the moment of her death. Perlove inclines to the latter view. But it hardly matters. What matters is the torrent of drapery, the pulled-up knees, the hands clutching the breast, the flung-back head. The pose is unearthly: a divine birth-pain. Among the decorative elements on the gilt panels around the painting, there are bursting pomegranates. The Blessed Ludovica, too, is bursting open. We see her on the verge. And Bernini leaves us there. •

**The hip defeatism of Judith Butler.**

# *The Professor of Parody*

**By Martha C. Nussbaum**

I.

For a long time, academic feminism in America has been closely allied to the practical struggle to achieve justice and equality for women. Feminist theory has been understood by theorists as not just fancy words on paper; theory is connected to proposals for social change. Thus feminist scholars have engaged in many concrete projects: the reform of rape law; winning attention and legal redress for the problems of domestic violence and sexual harassment; improving women's economic opportunities, working conditions, and education; winning pregnancy benefits for female workers; campaigning against the trafficking of women and girls in prostitution; working for the social and political equality of lesbians and gay men.

Indeed, some theorists have left the academy altogether, feeling more comfortable in the world of practical politics, where they can address these urgent problems directly. Those who remain in the academy have frequently made it a point of honor to be academics of a committed practical sort, eyes always on the material conditions of real women, writing always in a way that acknowledges those real bodies and those real struggles. One cannot read a page of Catharine MacKinnon, for example, without being engaged with a real issue of legal and institutional change. If one disagrees with her proposals—and many feminists disagree with them—the challenge posed by her writing is to find some other way of solving the problem that has been vividly delineated.

Feminists have differed in some cases about what is bad, and about what is needed to make things better; but all have agreed that the circumstances of women are often unjust and that law and political action can make them more nearly just. MacKinnon, who portrays hierarchy and subordination as endemic to our entire culture, is also committed to, and cautiously optimistic about, change through law—the domestic law of rape and sexual harassment and international human rights law. Even Nancy Chodorow, who, in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, offered a depressing account of the replication of oppressive gender categories in child-rearing, argued that this situation could change. Men and women could decide, understanding the unhappy consequences of these habits, that they will henceforth do things differently; and changes in laws and institutions can assist in such decisions.

Feminist theory still looks like this in many parts of the world. In India, for example, academic feminists have thrown themselves into practical struggles, and feminist theorizing is closely tethered to practical commitments such as female literacy, the reform of unequal land laws, changes in rape law (which, in

Martha C. Nussbaum's new book, *Sex and Social Justice*, has just been published by Oxford University Press.

*Excitable Speech:*
*A Politics of the Performative*
by Judith Butler
(Routledge, 185 pp., $17.99)

*The Psychic Life of Power:*
*Theories in Subjection*
by Judith Butler
(Stanford University Press, 218 pp., $14.95)

*Bodies that Matter:*
*On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*
by Judith Butler
(Routledge, 288 pp., $18.99)

*Gender Trouble:*
*Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*
by Judith Butler
(Routledge, 172 pp., $19.99)



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India today, has most of the flaws that the first generation of American feminists targeted), the effort to get social recognition for problems of sexual harassment and domestic violence. These feminists know that they live in the middle of a fiercely unjust reality; they cannot live with themselves without addressing it more or less daily, in their theoretical writing and in their activities outside the seminar room.

In the United States, however, things have been changing. One observes a new, disquieting trend. It is not only that feminist theory pays relatively little attention to the struggles of women outside the United States. (This was always a dispiriting feature even of much of the best work of the earlier period.) Something more insidious than provincialism has come to prominence in the American academy. It is the virtually complete turning from the material side of life, toward a type of verbal and symbolic politics that makes only the flimsiest of connections with the real situation of real women.

Feminist thinkers of the new symbolic type would appear to believe that the way to do feminist politics is to use words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstractness. These symbolic gestures, it is believed, are themselves a form of political resistance; and so one need not engage with messy things such as legislatures and movements in order to act daringly. The new feminism, moreover, instructs its members that there is little room for large-scale social change, and maybe no room at all. We are all, more or less, prisoners of the structures of power that have defined our identity as women; we can never change those structures in a large-scale way, and we can never escape from them. All that we can hope to do is to find spaces within the structures of power in which to parody them, to poke fun at them, to transgress them in speech. And so symbolic verbal politics, in addition to being offered as a type of real politics, is held to be the only politics that is really possible.

These developments owe much to the recent prominence of French postmodernist thought. Many young feminists, whatever their concrete affiliations with this or that French thinker, have been influenced by the extremely French idea that the intellectual does politics by speaking seditiously, and that this is a significant type of political action. Many have also derived from the writings of Michel Foucault (rightly or wrongly) the fatalistic idea that we are prisoners of an all-enveloping structure of power, and that real-life reform movements usually end up serving power in new and insidious ways. Such feminists therefore find comfort in the idea that the subversive use of words is still available to feminist intellectuals. Deprived of the hope of larger or more lasting changes, we can still perform our resistance by the reworking of verbal categories, and thus, at the margins, of the selves who are constituted by them.

One American feminist has shaped these developments more than any other. Judith Butler seems to many young scholars to define what feminism is now. Trained as a philosopher, she is frequently seen (more by people in literature than by philosophers) as a major thinker about gender, power, and the body. As we wonder what has become of old-style feminist politics and the material realities to which it was committed, it seems necessary to reckon with Butler's work and influence, and to scrutinize the arguments that have led so many to adopt a stance that looks very much like quietism and retreat.

## II.

It is difficult to come to grips with Butler's ideas, because it is difficult to figure out what they are. Butler is a very smart person. In public discussions, she proves that she can speak clearly and has a quick grasp of what is said to her. Her written style, however, is ponderous and obscure. It is dense with allusions to other theorists, drawn from a wide range of different theoretical traditions. In addition to Foucault, and to a more recent focus on Freud, Butler's work relies heavily on the thought of Louis Althusser, the French lesbian theorist Monique Wittig, the American anthropologist Gayle Rubin, Jacques Lacan, J. L. Austin, and the American philosopher of language Saul Kripke. These figures do not all agree with one another, to say the least; so an initial problem in reading Butler is that one is bewildered to find her arguments buttressed by appeal to so many contradictory concepts and doctrines, usually without any account of how the apparent contradictions will be resolved.

A further problem lies in Butler's casual mode of allusion. The ideas of these thinkers are never described in enough detail to include the uninitiated (if you are not familiar with the Althusserian concept of "interpellation," you are lost for chapters) or to explain to the initiated how, precisely, the difficult ideas are being understood. Of course, much academic writing is allusive in some way: it presupposes prior knowledge of certain doctrines and positions. But in both the continental and the Anglo-American philosophical traditions, academic writers for a specialist audience standardly acknowledge that the figures they mention are complicated, and the object of many different interpretations. They therefore typically assume the responsibility of advancing a definite interpretation among the contested ones, and of showing by argument why they have interpreted the figure as they have, and why their own interpretation is better than others.

We find none of this in Butler. Divergent interpretations are simply not considered—even where, as in the cases of Foucault and Freud, she is advancing highly contestable interpretations that would not be accepted by many scholars. Thus one is led to the conclusion that the allusiveness of the writing cannot be explained in the usual way, by positing an audience of specialists eager to debate the details of an esoteric academic position. The writing is simply too thin to satisfy any such audience. It is also obvious that Butler's work is not directed at a non-academic audience eager to grapple with actual injustices. Such an audience would simply be baffled by the thick soup of Butler's prose, by its air of in-group knowingness, by its extremely high ratio of names to explanations.

To whom, then, is Butler speaking? It would seem that she is addressing a group of young feminist theorists in the academy who are neither students of philosophy, caring about what Althusser and Freud and Kripke really said, nor outsiders, needing to be informed about the nature of their projects and persuaded of their worth. This implied audience is imagined as remarkably docile. Subservient to the oracular voice of Butler's text, and dazzled by its patina of high-concept abstractness, the imagined reader poses few questions, requests no arguments and no clear definitions of terms.

Still more strangely, the implied reader is expected not to care greatly about Butler's own final view on many matters. For a large proportion of the sentences in any book by Butler—especially sentences near the end of chapters—are questions. Sometimes the answer that the question expects is evident. But often things are much more indeterminate. Among the non-interrogative sentences, many begin with "Consider..." or "One could suggest..."—in such a way that Butler never quite tells the reader whether she approves of the view described. Mystification as well as hierarchy are the tools of her practice, a mystification that eludes criticism because it makes few definite claims.



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Take two representative examples:

> What does it mean for the agency of a subject to *presuppose* its own subordination? Is the act of *presupposing* the same as the act of *reinstating*, or is there a discontinuity between the power presupposed and the power reinstated? Consider that in the very act by which the subject reproduces the conditions of its own subordination, the subject exemplifies a temporally based vulnerability that belongs to those conditions, specifically, to the exigencies of their renewal.

And:

> Such questions cannot be answered here, but they indicate a direction for thinking that is perhaps prior to the question of conscience, namely, the question that preoccupied Spinoza, Nietzsche, and most recently, Giorgio Agamben: How are we to understand the desire to be as a constitutive desire? Resituating conscience and interpellation within such an account, we might then add to this question another: How is such a desire exploited not only by a law in the singular, but by laws of various kinds such that we yield to subordination in order to maintain some sense of social "being"?

Why does Butler prefer to write in this teasing, exasperating way? The style is certainly not unprecedented. Some precincts of the continental philosophical tradition, though surely not all of them, have an unfortunate tendency to regard the philosopher as a star who fascinates, and frequently by obscurity, rather than as an arguer among equals. When ideas are stated clearly, after all, they may be detached from their author: one can take them away and pursue them on one's own. When they remain mysterious (indeed, when they are not quite asserted), one remains dependent on the originating authority. The thinker is heeded only for his or her turgid charisma. One hangs in suspense, eager for the next move. When Butler does follow that "direction for thinking," what will she say? What does it mean, tell us please, for the agency of a subject to presuppose its own subordination? (No clear answer to this question, so far as I can see, is forthcoming.) One is given the impression of a mind so profoundly cogitative that it will not pronounce on anything lightly: so one waits, in awe of its depth, for it finally to do so.

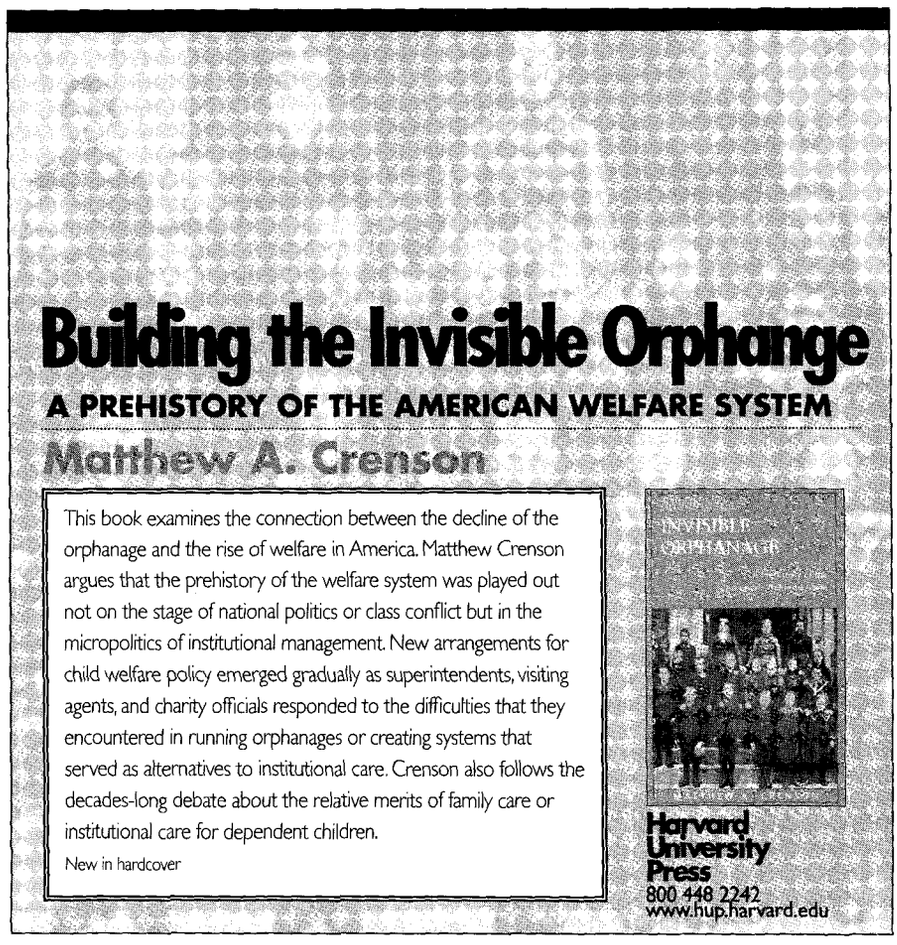
In this way obscurity creates an aura of importance. It also serves another related purpose. It bullies the reader into granting that, since one cannot figure out what is going on, there must be something significant going on, some complexity of thought, where in reality there are often familiar or even shopworn notions, addressed too simply and too casually to add any new dimension of understanding. When the bullied readers of Butler's books muster the daring to think thus, they will see that the ideas in these books are thin. When Butler's notions are stated clearly and succinctly, one sees that, without a lot more distinctions and arguments, they don't go far, and they are not especially new. Thus obscurity fills the void left by an absence of a real complexity of thought and argument.

Last year Butler won the first prize in the annual Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the journal *Philosophy and Literature*, for the following sentence:

> The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

Now, Butler might have written: "Marxist accounts, focusing on capital as the central force structuring social relations, depicted the operations of that force as everywhere uniform. By contrast, Althusserian accounts, focusing on power, see the operations of that force as variegated and as shifting over time." Instead, she prefers a verbosity that causes the reader to expend so much effort in deciphering her prose that little energy is left for assessing the truth of the claims. Announcing the award, the journal's editor remarked that "it's possibly the anxiety-inducing obscurity of such writing that has led Professor Warren Hedges of Southern Oregon University to praise Judith Butler as 'probably one of the ten smartest people on the planet.'" (Such bad writing, incidentally, is by no means ubiquitous in the "queer theory" group of theorists with which Butler is associated. David Halperin, for example, writes about the relationship between Foucault and Kant, and about Greek homosexuality, with philosophical clarity and historical precision.)

Butler gains prestige in the literary world by being a philosopher; many admirers associate her manner of writing with philosophical profundity. But one should ask whether it belongs to the philosophical tradition at all, rather than to the closely related but adversar-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ial traditions of sophistry and rhetoric. Ever since Socrates distinguished philosophy from what the sophists and the rhetoricians were doing, it has been a discourse of equals who trade arguments and counter-arguments without any obscurantist sleight-of-hand. In that way, he claimed, philosophy showed respect for the soul, while the others' manipulative methods showed only disrespect. One afternoon, fatigued by Butler on a long plane trip, I turned to a draft of a student's dissertation on Hume's views of personal identity. I quickly felt my spirits reviving. Doesn't she write clearly, I thought with pleasure, and a tiny bit of pride. And Hume, what a fine, what a gracious spirit: how kindly he respects the reader's intelligence, even at the cost of exposing his own uncertainty.

### III.

Butler's main idea, first introduced in *Gender Trouble* in 1989 and repeated throughout her books, is that gender is a social artifice. Our ideas of what women and men are reflect nothing that exists eternally in nature. Instead they derive from customs that embed social relations of power.

This notion, of course, is nothing new. The denaturalizing of gender was present already in Plato, and it received a great boost from John Stuart Mill, who claimed in *The Subjection of Women* that "what is now called the nature of women is an eminently artificial thing." Mill saw that claims about "women's nature" derive from, and shore up, hierarchies of power: womanliness is made to be whatever would serve the cause of keeping women in subjection, or, as he put it, "enslav[ing] their minds." With the family as with feudalism, the rhetoric of nature itself serves the cause of slavery. "The subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural.... But was there ever any domination which did not appear natural to those who possessed it?"

Mill was hardly the first social-constructionist. Similar ideas about anger, greed, envy, and other prominent features of our lives had been commonplace in the history of philosophy since ancient Greece. And Mill's application of familiar notions of social-construction to gender needed, and still needs, much fuller development; his suggestive remarks did not yet amount to a theory of gender. Long before Butler came on the scene, many feminists contributed to the articulation of such an account.

In work published in the 1970s and 1980s, Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin argued that the conventional understanding of gender roles is a way of ensuring continued male domination in sexual relations, as well as in the public sphere. They took the core of Mill's insight into a sphere of life concerning which the Victorian philosopher had said little. (Not nothing, though: in 1869 Mill already understood that the failure to criminalize rape within marriage defined woman as a tool for male use and negated her human dignity.) Before Butler, MacKinnon and Dworkin addressed the feminist fantasy of an idyllic natural sexuality of women that only needed to be "liberated"; and argued that social forces go so deep that we should not suppose we have access to such a notion of "nature." Before Butler, they stressed the ways in which male-dominated power structures marginalize and subordinate not only women, but also people who would like to choose a same-sex relationship. They understood that discrimination against gays and lesbians is a way of enforcing the familiar hierarchically ordered gender roles; and so they saw discrimination against gays and lesbians as a form of sex discrimination.

Before Butler, the psychologist Nancy Chodorow gave a detailed and compelling account of how gender differences replicate themselves across the generations: she argued that the ubiquity of these mechanisms of replication enables us to understand how what is artificial can nonetheless be nearly ubiquitous. Before Butler, the biologist Anne Fausto Sterling, through her painstaking criticism of experimental work allegedly supporting the naturalness of conventional gender distinctions, showed how deeply social power-relations had compromised the objectivity of scientists: *Myths of Gender* (1985) was an apt title for what she found in the biology of the time. (Other biologists and primatologists also contributed to this enterprise.) Before Butler, the political theorist Susan Moller Okin explored the role of law and political thought in constructing a gendered destiny for women in the family; and this project, too, was pursued further by a number of feminists in law and political philosophy. Before Butler, Gayle Rubin's important anthropological account of subordination, *The Traffic in Women* (1975), provided a valuable analysis of the relationship between the social organization of gender and the asymmetries of power.

So what does Butler's work add to this copious body of writing? *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* contain no detailed argument against biological claims of "natural" difference, no account of mechanisms of gender replication, and no account of the legal shaping of the family; nor do they contain any detailed focus on possibilities for legal change. What, then, does Butler offer that we might not find more fully done in earlier feminist writings? One relatively original claim is that when we recognize the artificiality of gender distinctions, and refrain from thinking of them as expressing an independent natural reality, we will also understand that there is no compelling reason why the gender types should have been two (correlated with the two biological sexes), rather than three or five or indefinitely many. "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice," she writes.

From this claim it does not follow, for Butler, that we can freely reinvent the genders as we like: she holds, indeed, that there are severe limits to our freedom. She insists that we should not naïvely imagine that there is a pristine self that stands behind society, ready to emerge all pure and liberated: "There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains 'integrity' prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there." Butler does claim, though, that we can create categories that are in some sense new ones, by means of the artful parody of the old ones. Thus her best known idea, her conception of politics as a parodic performance, is born out of the sense of a (strictly limited) freedom that comes from the recognition that one's ideas of gender have been shaped by forces that are social rather than biological. We are doomed to repetition of the power structures into which we are born, but we can at least make fun of them; and some ways of making fun are subversive assaults on the original norms.

The idea of gender as performance is Butler's most famous idea, and so it is worth pausing to scrutinize it more closely. She introduced the notion intuitively, in *Gender Trouble*, without invoking theoretical precedent. Later she denied that she was referring to quasi-theatrical performance, and associated her notion instead with Austin's account of speech acts in *How to Do Things with Words*. Austin's linguistic category of "performatives" is a category of linguistic utterances that function, in and of themselves, as actions rather than as assertions. When (in appropriate social circumstances) I say "I bet ten dollars," or "I'm sorry," or "I do" (in a



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marriage ceremony), or "I name this ship...," I am not reporting on a bet or an apology or a marriage or a naming ceremony, I am conducting one.

Butler's analogous claim about gender is not obvious, since the "performances" in question involve gesture, dress, movement, and action, as well as language. Austin's thesis, which is restricted to a rather technical analysis of a certain class of sentences, is in fact not especially helpful to Butler in developing her ideas. Indeed, though she vehemently repudiates readings of her work that associate her view with theater, thinking about the Living Theater's subversive work with gender seems to illuminate her ideas far more than thinking about Austin.

Nor is Butler's treatment of Austin very plausible. She makes the bizarre claim that the fact that the marriage ceremony is one of dozens of examples of performatives in Austin's text suggests "that the heterosexualization of the social bond is the paradigmatic form for those speech acts which bring about what they name." Hardly. Marriage is no more paradigmatic for Austin than betting or ship-naming or promising or apologizing. He is interested in a formal feature of certain utterances, and we are given no reason to suppose that their content has any significance for his argument. It is usually a mistake to read earth-shaking significance into a philosopher's pedestrian choice of examples. Should we say that Aristotle's use of a low-fat diet to illustrate the practical syllogism suggests that chicken is at the heart of Aristotelian virtue? Or that Rawls's use of travel plans to illustrate practical reasoning shows that *A Theory of Justice* aims at giving us all a vacation?

Leaving these oddities to one side, Butler's point is presumably this: when we act and speak in a gendered way, we are not simply reporting on something that is already fixed in the world, we are actively constituting it, replicating it, and reinforcing it. By behaving as if there were male and female "natures," we co-create the social fiction that these natures exist. They are never there apart from our deeds; we are always making them be there. At the same time, by carrying out these performances in a slightly different manner, a parodic manner, we can perhaps unmake them just a little.

Thus the one place for agency in a world constrained by hierarchy is in the small opportunities we have to oppose gender roles every time they take shape. When I find myself doing femaleness, I can turn it around, poke fun at it, do it a little bit differently. Such reactive and parodic performances, in Butler's view, never destabilize the larger system. She doesn't envisage mass movements of resistance or campaigns for political reform; only personal acts carried out by a small number of knowing actors. Just as actors with a bad script can subvert it by delivering the bad lines oddly, so too with gender: the script remains bad, but the actors have a tiny bit of freedom. Thus we have the basis for what, in *Excitable Speech*, Butler calls "an ironic hopefulness."

Up to this point, Butler's contentions, though relatively familiar, are plausible and even interesting, though one is already unsettled by her narrow vision of the possibilities for change. Yet Butler adds to these plausible claims about gender two other claims that are stronger and more contentious. The first is that there is no agent behind or prior to the social forces that produce the self. If this means only that babies are born into a gendered world that begins to replicate males and females almost immediately, the claim is plausible, but not surprising: experiments have for some time demonstrated that the way babies are held and talked to, the way their emotions are described, are profoundly shaped by the sex the adults in question believe the child to have. (The same baby will be bounced if the adults think it is a boy, cuddled if they think it is a girl; its crying will be labeled as fear if the adults think it is a girl, as anger if they think it is a boy.) Butler shows no interest in these empirical facts, but they do support her contention.

If she means, however, that babies enter the world completely inert, with no tendencies and no abilities that are in some sense prior to their experience in a gendered society, this is far less plausible, and difficult to support empirically. Butler offers no such support, preferring to remain on the high plane of metaphysical abstraction. (Indeed, her recent Freudian work may even repudiate this idea: it suggests, with Freud, that there are at least some presocial impulses and tendencies, although, typically, this line is not clearly developed.) Moreover, such an exaggerated denial of pre-cultural agency takes away some of the resources that Chodorow and others use when they try to account for cultural change in the direction of the better.

Butler does in the end want to say that we have a kind of agency, an ability to undertake change and resistance. But where does this ability come from, if there is no structure in the personality that is not thoroughly power's creation? It is not impossible for Butler to answer


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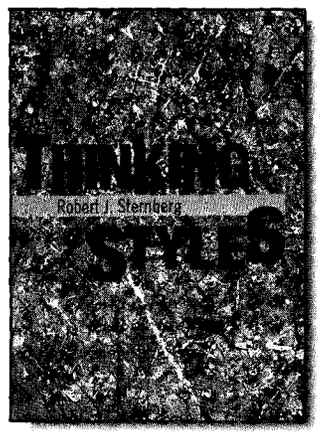


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this question, but she certainly has not answered it yet, in a way that would convince those who believe that human beings have at least some pre-cultural desires—for food, for comfort, for cognitive mastery, for survival—and that this structure in the personality is crucial in the explanation of our development as moral and political agents. One would like to see her engage with the strongest forms of such a view, and to say, clearly and without jargon, exactly why and where she rejects them. One would also like to hear her speak about real infants, who do appear to manifest a structure of striving that influences from the start their reception of cultural forms.

Butler's second strong claim is that the body itself, and especially the distinction between the two sexes, is also a social construction. She means not only that the body is shaped in many ways by social norms of how men and women should be; she means also that the fact that a binary division of sexes is taken as fundamental, as a key to arranging society, is itself a social idea that is not given in bodily reality. What exactly does this claim mean, and how plausible is it?

Butler's brief exploration of Foucault on hermaphrodites does show us society's anxious insistence to classify every human being in one box or another, whether or not the individual fits a box; but of course it does not show that there are many such indeterminate cases. She is right to insist that we might have made many different classifications of body types, not necessarily focusing on the binary division as the most salient; and she is also right to insist that, to a large extent, claims of bodily sex difference allegedly based upon scientific research have been projections of cultural prejudice—though Butler offers nothing here that is nearly as compelling as Fausto Sterling's painstaking biological analysis.

And yet it is much too simple to say that power is all that the body is. We might have had the bodies of birds or dinosaurs or lions, but we do not; and this reality shapes our choices. Culture can shape and reshape some aspects of our bodily existence, but it does not shape all the aspects of it. "In the man burdened by hunger and thirst," as Sextus Empiricus observed long ago, "it is impossible to produce by argument the conviction that he is not so burdened." This is an important fact also for feminism, since women's nutritional needs (and their special needs when pregnant or lactating) are an important feminist topic. Even where sex difference is concerned, it is surely too simple to write it all off as culture; nor should feminists be eager to make such a sweeping gesture. Women who run or play basketball, for example, were right to welcome the demolition of myths about women's athletic performance that were the product of male-dominated assumptions; but they were also right to demand the specialized research on women's bodies that has fostered a better understanding of women's training needs and women's injuries. In short: what feminism needs, and sometimes gets, is a subtle study of the interplay of bodily difference and cultural construction. And Butler's abstract pronouncements, floating high above all matter, give us none of what we need.

## IV.

Suppose we grant Butler her most interesting claims up to this point: that the social structure of gender is ubiquitous, but we can resist it by subversive and parodic acts. Two significant questions remain. What should be resisted, and on what basis? What would the acts of resistance be like, and what would we expect them to accomplish?

Butler uses several words for what she takes to be bad and therefore worthy of resistance: the "repressive," the "subordinating," the "oppressive." But she provides no empirical discussion of resistance of the sort that we find, say, in Barry Adam's fascinating sociological study *The Survival of Domination* (1978), which studies the subordination of blacks, Jews, women, and gays and lesbians, and their ways of wrestling with the forms of social power that have oppressed them. Nor does Butler provide any account of the concepts of resistance and oppression that would help us, were we really in doubt about what we ought to be resisting.

Butler departs in this regard from earlier social-constructionist feminists, all of whom used ideas such as non-hierarchy, equality, dignity, autonomy, and treating as an end rather than a means, to indicate a direction for actual politics. Still less is she willing to elaborate any positive normative notion. Indeed, it is clear that Butler, like Foucault, is adamantly opposed to normative notions such as human dignity, or treating humanity as an end, on the grounds that they are inherently dictatorial. In her view, we ought to wait to see what the political struggle itself throws up, rather than prescribe in advance to its participants. Universal normative notions, she says, "colonize under the sign of the same."

This idea of waiting to see what we get—in a word, this moral passivity—seems plausible in Butler because she tacitly assumes an audience of like-minded readers who agree (sort of) about what the bad things are—discrimination against gays and lesbians, the unequal and hierarchical treatment of women—and who even agree (sort of) about why they are bad (they subordinate some people to others, they deny people freedoms that they ought to have). But take that assumption away, and the absence of a normative dimension becomes a severe problem.

Try teaching Foucault at a contemporary law school, as I have, and you will quickly find that subversion takes many forms, not all of them congenial to Butler and her allies. As a perceptive libertarian student said to me, Why can't I use these ideas to resist the tax structure, or the anti-discrimination laws, or perhaps even to join the militias? Others, less fond of liberty, might engage in the subversive performances of making fun of feminist remarks in class, or ripping down the posters of the lesbian and gay law students' association. These things happen. They are parodic and subversive: Why, then, aren't they daring and good?

Well, there are good answers to those questions, but you won't find them in Foucault, or in Butler. Answering them requires discussing which liberties and opportunities human beings ought to have, and what it is for social institutions to treat human beings as ends rather than as means—in short, a normative theory of social justice and human dignity. It is one thing to say that we should be humble about our universal norms, and willing to learn from the experience of oppressed people. It is quite another thing to say that we don't need any norms at all. Foucault, unlike Butler, at least showed signs in his late work of grappling with this problem; and all his writing is animated by a fierce sense of the texture of social oppression and the harm that it does.

Come to think of it, justice, understood as a personal virtue, has exactly the structure of gender in the Butlerian analysis: it is not innate or "natural," it is produced by repeated performances (or as Aristotle said, we learn it by doing it), it shapes our inclinations and forces the repression of some of them. These ritual performances, and their associated repressions, are enforced by arrangements of social power, as children who won't share on the playground quickly discover. Moreover, the parodic subversion of justice is ubiquitous in politics, as in personal life. But there is an important difference. Generally we dislike these subversive performances, and we think that young people should be strongly discouraged from seeing norms



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of justice in such a cynical light. Butler cannot explain in any purely structural or procedural way why the subversion of gender norms is a social good while the subversion of justice norms is a social bad. Foucault, we should remember, cheered for the Ayatollah, and why not? That, too, was resistance, and there was indeed nothing in the text to tell us that that struggle was less worthy than a struggle for civil rights and civil liberties.

There is a void, then, at the heart of Butler's notion of politics. This void can look liberating, because the reader fills it implicitly with a normative theory of human equality or dignity. But let there be no mistake: for Butler, as for Foucault, subversion is subversion, and it can in principle go in any direction. Indeed, Butler's naïvely empty politics is especially dangerous for the very causes she holds dear. For every friend of Butler, eager to engage in subversive performances that proclaim the repressiveness of heterosexual gender norms, there are dozens who would like to engage in subversive performances that flout the norms of tax compliance, of non-discrimination, of decent treatment of one's fellow students. To such people we should say, you cannot simply resist as you please, for there are norms of fairness, decency, and dignity that entail that this is bad behavior. But then we have to articulate those norms—and this Butler refuses to do.

## V.

What precisely does Butler offer when she counsels subversion? She tells us to engage in parodic performances, but she warns us that the dream of escaping altogether from the oppressive structures is just a dream: it is within the oppressive structures that we must find little spaces for resistance, and this resistance cannot hope to change the overall situation. And here lies a dangerous quietism.

If Butler means only to warn us against the dangers of fantasizing an idyllic world in which sex raises no serious problems, she is wise to do so. Yet frequently she goes much further. She suggests that the institutional structures that ensure the marginalization of lesbians and gay men in our society, and the continued inequality of women, will never be changed in a deep way; and so our best hope is to thumb our noses at them, and to find pockets of personal freedom within them. "Called by an injurious name, I come into social being, and because I have a certain inevitable attachment to my existence, because a certain narcissism takes hold of any term that confers existence, I am led to embrace the terms that injure me because they constitute me socially." In other words: I cannot escape the humiliating structures without ceasing to be, so the best I can do is mock, and use the language of subordination stingingly. In Butler, resistance is always imagined as personal, more or less private, involving no unironic, organized public action for legal or institutional change.

Isn't this like saying to a slave that the institution of slavery will never change, but you can find ways of mocking it and subverting it, finding your personal freedom within those acts of carefully limited defiance? Yet it is a fact that the institution of slavery can be changed, and was changed—but not by people who took a Butler-like view of the possibilities. It was changed because people did not rest content with parodic performance: they demanded, and to some extent they got, social upheaval. It is also a fact that the institutional structures that shape women's lives have changed. The law of rape, still defective, has at least improved; the law of sexual harassment exists, where it did not exist before; marriage is no longer regarded as giving men monarchical control over women's bodies. These things were changed by feminists who would not take parodic performance as their answer, who thought that power, where bad, should, and would, yield before justice.

Butler not only eschews such a hope, she takes pleasure in its impossibility. She finds it exciting to contemplate the alleged immovability of power, and to envisage the ritual subversions of the slave who is convinced that she must remain such. She tells us—this is the central thesis of *The Psychic Life of Power*—that we all eroticize the power structures that oppress us, and can thus find sexual pleasure only within their confines. It seems to be for that reason that she prefers the sexy acts of parodic subversion to any lasting material or institutional change. Real change would so uproot our psyches that it would make sexual satisfaction impossible. Our libidos are the creation of the bad enslaving forces, and thus necessarily sadomasochistic in structure.

Well, parodic performance is not so bad when you are a powerful tenured academic in a liberal university. But here is where Butler's focus on the symbolic, her proud neglect of the material side of life, becomes a fatal blindness. For women who are hungry, illiterate, disenfranchised, beaten, raped, it is not sexy or liberating to reenact, however parodically, the conditions of hunger, illiteracy, disenfranchisement, beating, and rape. Such women prefer food, schools, votes, and the integrity of their bodies. I see no reason to believe that they long sadomasochistically for a return to the bad state. If some individuals cannot live without the sexiness of domination, that seems sad, but it is not really our business. But when a major theorist tells women in desperate conditions that life offers them only bondage, she purveys a cruel lie, and a lie that flatters evil by giving it much more power than it actually has.

*Excitable Speech*, Butler's most recent book, which provides her analysis of legal controversies involving pornography and hate speech, shows us exactly how far her quietism extends. For she is now willing to say that even where legal change is possible, even where it has already happened, we should wish it away, so as to preserve the space within which the oppressed may enact their sadomasochistic rituals of parody.

As a work on the law of free speech, *Excitable Speech* is an unconscionably bad book. Butler shows no awareness of the major theoretical accounts of the First Amendment, and no awareness of the wide range of cases such a theory will need to take into consideration. She makes absurd legal claims: for example,


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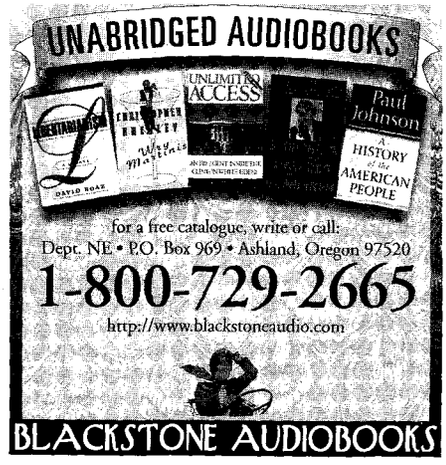





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she says that the only type of speech that has been held to be unprotected is speech that has been previously defined as conduct rather than speech. (In fact, there are many types of speech, from false or misleading advertising to libelous statements to obscenity as currently defined, which have never been claimed to be action rather than speech, and which are nonetheless denied First Amendment protection.) Butler even claims, mistakenly, that obscenity has been judged to be the equivalent of "fighting words." It is not that Butler has an argument to back up her novel readings of the wide range of cases of unprotected speech that an account of the First Amendment would need to cover. She just has not noticed that there is this wide range of cases, or that her view is not a widely accepted legal view. Nobody interested in law can take her argument seriously.

But let us extract from Butler's thin discussion of hate speech and pornography the core of her position. It is this: legal prohibitions of hate speech and pornography are problematic (though in the end she does not clearly oppose them) because they close the space within which the parties injured by that speech can perform their resistance. By this Butler appears to mean that if the offense is dealt with through the legal system, there will be fewer occasions for informal protest; and also, perhaps, that if the offense becomes rarer because of its illegality we will have fewer opportunities to protest its presence.

Well, yes. Law does close those spaces. Hate speech and pornography are extremely complicated subjects on which feminists may reasonably differ. (Still, one should state the contending views precisely: Butler's account of MacKinnon is less than careful, stating that MacKinnon supports "ordinances against pornography" and suggesting that, despite MacKinnon's explicit denial, they involve a form of censorship. Nowhere does Butler mention that what MacKinnon actually supports is a civil damage action in which particular women harmed through pornography can sue its makers and its distributors.)

But Butler's argument has implications well beyond the cases of hate speech and pornography. It would appear to support not just quietism in these areas, but a much more general legal quietism—or, indeed, a radical libertarianism. It goes like this: let us do away with everything from building codes to non-discrimination laws to rape laws, because they close the space within which the injured tenants, the victims of discrimination, the raped women, can perform their resistance. Now, this is not the same argument radical libertarians use to oppose building codes and anti-discrimination laws; even they draw the line at rape. But the conclusions converge.

If Butler should reply that her argument pertains only to speech (and there is no reason given in the text for such a limitation, given the assimilation of harmful speech to conduct), then we can reply in the domain of speech. Let us get rid of laws against false advertising and unlicensed medical advice, for they close the space within which poisoned consumers and mutilated patients can perform their resistance! Again, if Butler does not approve of these extensions, she needs to make an argument that divides her cases from these cases, and it is not clear that her position permits her to make such a distinction.

For Butler, the act of subversion is so riveting, so sexy, that it is a bad dream to think that the world will actually get better. What a bore equality is! No bondage, no delight. In this way, her pessimistic erotic anthropology offers support to an amoral anarchist politics.

## VI.

When we consider the quietism inherent in Butler's writing, we have some keys to understanding Butler's influential fascination with drag and cross-dressing as paradigms of feminist resistance. Butler's followers understand her account of drag to imply that such performances are ways for women to be daring and subversive. I am unaware of any attempt by Butler to repudiate such readings.

But what is going on here? The woman dressed mannishly is hardly a new figure. Indeed, even when she was relatively new, in the nineteenth century, she was in another way quite old, for she simply replicated in the lesbian world the existing stereotypes and hierarchies of male-female society. What, we may well ask, is parodic subversion in this area, and what a kind of prosperous middle-class acceptance? Isn't hierarchy in drag still hierarchy? And is it really true (as *The Psychic Life of Power* would seem to conclude) that domination and subordination are the roles that women must play in every sphere, and if not subordination, then mannish domination?

In short, cross-dressing for women is a tired old script—as Butler herself informs us. Yet she would have us see the script as subverted, made new, by the cross-dresser's knowing symbolic sartorial gestures; but again we must wonder about the newness, and even the subversiveness. Consider Andrea Dworkin's parody (in her novel *Mercy*) of a Butlerish parodic feminist, who announces from her posture of secure academic comfort:

> The notion that bad things happen is both propagandistic and inadequate.... To understand a woman's life requires that we affirm the hidden or obscure dimensions of pleasure, often in pain, and choice, often under duress. One must develop an eye for secret signs—the clothes that are more than clothes or decoration in the contemporary dialogue, for instance, or the rebellion hidden behind apparent conformity. There is no victim. There is perhaps an insufficiency of signs, an obdurate appearance of conformity that simply masks the deeper level on which choice occurs.

In prose quite unlike Butler's, this passage captures the ambivalence of the implied author of some of Butler's writings, who delights in her violative practice while turning her theoretical eye resolutely away from the material suffering of women who are hungry, illiterate, violated, beaten. There is no victim. There is only an insufficiency of signs.

Butler suggests to her readers that this sly send-up of the status quo is the only script for resistance that life offers. Well, no. Besides offering many other ways to be human in one's personal life, beyond traditional norms of domination and subservience, life also offers many scripts for resistance that do not focus narcissistically on personal self-presentation. Such scripts involve feminists (and others, of course) in building laws and institutions, without much concern for how a woman displays her own body and its gendered nature: in short, they involve working for others who are suffering.

The great tragedy in the new feminist theory in America is the loss of a sense of public commitment. In this sense, Butler's self-involved feminism is extremely American, and it is not surprising that it has caught on here, where successful middle-class people prefer to focus on cultivating the self rather than thinking in a way that helps the material condition of others. Even in America, however, it is possible for theorists to be dedicated to the public good and to achieve something through that effort.

Many feminists in America are *still* theorizing in a way that supports material change and responds to the situation of the most oppressed. Increasingly, however, the academic and cultural trend is toward the pessimistic flirtatiousness represented by the theorizing



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of Butler and her followers. Butlerian feminism is in many ways easier than the old feminism. It tells scores of talented young women that they need not work on changing the law, or feeding the hungry, or assailing power through theory harnessed to material politics. They can do politics in safety of their campuses, remaining on the symbolic level, making subversive gestures at power through speech and gesture. This, the theory says, is pretty much all that is available to us anyway, by way of political action, and isn't it exciting and sexy?

In its small way, of course, this is a hopeful politics. It instructs people that they can, right now, without compromising their security, do something bold. But the boldness is entirely gestural, and insofar as Butler's ideal suggests that these symbolic gestures really are political change, it offers only a false hope. Hungry women are not fed by this, battered women are not sheltered by it, raped women do not find justice in it, gays and lesbians do not achieve legal protections through it.

Finally there is despair at the heart of the cheerful Butlerian enterprise. The big hope, the hope for a world of real justice, where laws and institutions protect the equality and the dignity of all citizens, has been banished, even perhaps mocked as sexually tedious. Judith Butler's hip quietism is a comprehensible response to the difficulty of realizing justice in America. But it is a bad response. It collaborates with evil. Feminism demands more and women deserve better. •

# *Clintonism*

**BY ALAN TAYLOR**

## The Birth of Empire: DeWitt Clinton and the American Experience, 1769–1828 by Evan Cornog

**(Oxford University Press, 224 pp., $29.95)**

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the new American republic teetered between the danger of collapse and the promise of greatness. By expanding westward to occupy most of North America, the United States might develop into imperial wealth and power—if the nation could survive its first vulnerable decades. The great paradox of the new nation was that its short-term prospects appeared dire and its long-term prospects appeared limitless. This paradox derived from the immense size and resources of the continent—riches that could either pull apart or pull together the people striving to possess them.

The continental scale of American history immediately threatened to overwhelm and to fracture the young republic sprawled along the Atlantic seaboard from Maine to Georgia. In 1791, the Secretary of War warned the President: "The United States have come into existence as a nation, embarrassed with a frontier of immense extent." Expansion westward might weaken the coastal states while creating new, independent, and hostile settler states in the interior; and those polities might gravitate into the rival empires of Spain to the south or Britain to the north. Moreover, the new nation's gamble on a republican frame of government enhanced the prospects of such a centrifugal dissipation.

Reliant on popular consent, republics had been few, inherently weak, chronically unstable, and usually short-lived, especially when they expanded to include a large and diverse population. Most of the republics of the past had been riven with violent factionalism, and had quickly collapsed into anarchy before settling for the oppressive order of a military tyranny. Only small, homogeneous, and antiquated polities—ancient city-states or medieval cantons—had sustained a republic for more than a single generation. The modern nations and empires of eighteenth-century Europe relied upon coercive and centralized power exercised by a monarch, an emperor, or an aristocracy to preserve the unity of far-flung and variegated peoples.

To expand into an empire, then, it appeared that Americans might have to forsake their republican liberty. And the initial years of the American republic seemed to confirm this conventional wisdom. After staggering through a long and debilitating war for independence from Britain, the United States virtually dissolved during the mid-1780s, while leading western settlers plotted secession with covert encouragement from Spanish and British agents. The federal constitution framed in 1787 and ratified in 1788 represented a last attempt to establish a union of thirteen republican states—a final, desperate formula for combining imperial scale with republican principles. From our hindsight in "the American century," the new government of George Washington may seem to have been the foundation for an inevitable superpower; but his contemporaries could not be so sure.

The republic's leaders derived both inspiration and anxiety from their republican predecessors, the ancient Romans. From a republican base, the Romans achieved a great empire; but they achieved it at a great cost, as imperialism consumed their republic, transforming it into a military despotism. As Rome became imperial, Caesar supplanted Cicero. Americans could only hope that they might fully succeed where the Romans had partially failed—that they might find a way to sustain an expanding imperial republic.

DeWitt Clinton of New York considered himself (and impressed his contemporaries) as a latter-day Roman, an American incarnation of Cicero or, perhaps, Caesar. Tall, handsome, strong, keenly intelligent, and conspicuously learned, Clinton spoke and carried himself with a self-assurance that seemed to mark a great historical figure, a true classical statesman. He cultivated the multiple expertise of the neoclassical tradition, presenting himself simultaneously as a patrician politician, a cultural patron, an antiquarian scholar, and an amateur scientist. Hiding behind a pseudonym, he praised himself to the reading public: "Mr. Clinton, among his other great qualifications, is distinguished for a marked devotion to science; few men have read more and few men can claim more various and extensive knowledge; and the bounties of nature have been improved by his persevering and unremitting industry."

By exposing Clinton's identity behind the pseudonym, his enemies gleefully added to his reputation for legendary egotism. To mock his combination of stature and hauteur, Clinton's rivals dubbed him "Magnus Apollo"— but the gibe redounded against them, for it suggested that Clinton did indeed live and think on a grander scale than ordinary mortals. Unintentionally, the sobriquet diminished its inventors as it enhanced its subject's larger-than-life image. If he was Magnus Apollo, then they were petty and pedestrian office-seekers.

Like his fellow New Yorkers and early



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rivals Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr, Clinton was a compound of republican rhetoric and imperial opportunism. He embodied a protean energy that could either sustain or explode the growing, vulnerable republic. Observers were divided over the national implications of Clinton's drive to enhance the economic wealth and the political power of New York. Would New York's success benefit the entire nation or blow it apart? Would an imperial state become virtually autonomous, or would it serve as a model for national growth and integration? Would Clinton's phenomenal career hasten or postpone a collapse of the union into civil war (a prospect that recurrently haunted the republic's leaders)?

DeWitt Clinton inherited an imperial vision of New York's prospects from his father James Clinton and, especially, from his formidable uncle George Clinton. Both played leading roles in the revolutionary cause in New York. As a Continental Army general, James Clinton helped to destroy the Indian villages of central and western New York, turning the Iroquois inhabitants into demoralized refugees and opening the region's fertile lands to postwar settlement by the victors. In 1777, George Clinton became New York's first elected governor; and, in five successive reelection victories, he consolidated his power as the state's preeminent politician. Determined to turn New York into the most powerful and the most autonomous state in an impotent confederation, Clinton regularly defied the Continental Congress during the 1780s.

New York was a microcosm of the national paradox of immediate weakness and immense potential. Long hemmed in by the Iroquois and recently devastated by war, New York was a middle-tier state in terms of population and prosperity. In the new confederation of thirteen states, New York ranked sixth in population in 1790, lagging behind even its tiny neighbor Connecticut. The authority of New York was largely confined, like its inhabitants, to its eastern quarter: to Long Island and the Hudson Valley. To the west stretched immense tracts of fertile but heavily forested land, recently wrested from the Iroquois but not yet secured by settlement to New York. As in the nation at large, those potential western riches threatened to attract the designs of rival states, unruly squatters, and the jealousy of the British empire in adjoining Canada.

Yet geography favored George Clinton's vision of an empire state. New York combined the nation's most promising seaport city with the easiest route westward—through the Appalachian barrier by way of the Mohawk valley and the Finger Lakes—to the immense potential riches of the continental interior. New York could become the great conduit for settlers to emigrate deep into the continent to secure farms, and for their produce to flow eastward through New York City into the trans-Atlantic market.

During the 1780s, George Clinton's zealous pursuit of power for himself and for his state threatened to unravel the tenuous new confederation. As New York transformed its interior from unsettled menace to settled asset, the state might become too powerful for the rest of the confederation to control. By becoming imperial, New York imperiled the federal bid to achieve the same objective on a national scale. Determined to preserve his state's primacy in collecting import taxes from New York City's swelling international commerce, George Clinton worked in the 1780s to keep the confederacy weak, and to prevent ratification of the federal Constitution. And the governor's young protégé and secretary, his nephew DeWitt, assisted the Antifederalist cause by writing anonymous newspaper essays that attacked the supporters of the Constitution (the Federalists) as antidemocratic elitists.

Despite the best efforts of the Clintons, the Federalists ratified the constitution in New York, as in the other states. Ever resourceful, George Clinton quickly sought power in the national union by intriguing to gain election as the first vice president of the new government that he had so vigorously and so recently opposed. He lost out to John Adams, but he established the precedent that the Clintons would pursue state power while keeping a hand in the national politics of making presidents and vice presidents.

DeWitt Clinton was born and bred to pursue his uncle's vision in the next generation and within the confines of the federal Constitution. Raised in comfort and exquisitely well-educated, he was an arrogant, talented young man in a hurry to enjoy power. He attended a private academy, graduated first in his class at Columbia University in 1786, and studied law in the office of New York City's preeminent trial attorney. Identified with the Republican party of his uncle and Thomas Jefferson (not to be confused with the Republican party of Henry Hyde and Trent Lott), DeWitt Clinton exuberantly assailed their Federalist rivals. After two losing races, he won a seat in the state assembly in 1797, and a year later he advanced to the state Senate, where he became, by 1801, at the age of thirty-one, the dominant power broker in the state legislature.

Evan Cornog's book displays both the strengths and the limitations of a conventional political biography. He creates a forceful and colorful portrait of his vital and powerful subject, but he tends to reduce politics to the interaction of a few leading men acting out the strengths and the weaknesses of their personalities. In portraying DeWitt Clinton's character, Cornog settles for the trope of the great and greatly flawed leader who alternates grand victories with colossal failures. Rather like our Bill Clinton, his DeWitt Clinton recurrently finds in defeat the seeds of his next triumph, but he also invariably squanders victory by indulging in uncompromising fantasies of control and revenge. This biographical approach makes for a lucid and largely true story that lingers on the personal and contingent. Cornog stays on the surface of New York's politics in the early republic, and so he fails to get at the larger structures of power. He attributes too much to the vagaries of Clinton's personality and too little to the political culture that constrained his options.

By attributing Clinton's jockeying for political position to personal whim, Cornog depicts his protagonist as mercurial and erratic—when, in fact, more should be credited to the peculiar dictates of New York's chronically unstable political culture. Clinton rose so far and so fast by mastering the factional intricacies of New York politics, but he could ascend no further to national power because the state's political culture was so viciously incestuous—and so notoriously mysterious. Although Oliver Wolcott had previously excelled at politics in neighboring Connecticut, he later lamented that "after living a dozen years in New York, I don't pretend to comprehend their politics. It is a labyrinth of wheels within wheels, and it is understood only by the managers."

As the consummate political manager, DeWitt Clinton understood New York politics all too well. New York confused outsiders who took too seriously the identity and the rhetoric of political parties. Lacking in formal apparatus, those parties were convenient fronts claimed by shifting coalitions of "interests." In New York parlance, an interest was an unstable cluster of ambitious men and the voters they could influence, all mustered under the leadership of the principal man of an especially powerful family. In New York during the 1780s and 1790s, the preeminent



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interests were those of the Clinton, Livingston, Schuyler, and Van Rensselaer families—as well as the personal following of the charismatic and cunning Aaron Burr. No single interest could gain power and hold power without an alliance with another. George Clinton clung to power from 1777 to 1795 by sharing the state patronage with the Livingston clan and with Burr, all united by little more than the Republican name and a determination to hold at bay the Schuylers and the Van Rensselaers, who called themselves Federalists.

Pragmatic rather than ideological, the interests sought state power less to promote policy than to reap patronage: government contracts, bank charters, salaried positions. The great vehicle, the great prize, was the Council of Appointment, a constitutional feature peculiar to New York. The Council consisted of the governor and four state senators chosen annually by the state assembly. The Council exercised the power to appoint and to replace almost every public officeholder in New York at the city, county, and state levels. Every local justice of the peace, militia officer, county judge and clerk, city mayor, and state department head obtained and held office at the sufferance of the Council of Appointment.

To seek and to keep public office, aspiring men enlisted in an interest that entered a coalition intent on capturing the governorship and the state legislature, so that they might control the Council. The victors swept the losers from office. Consequently, New York pioneered and perfected the infamous "spoils system" of nineteenth-century American politics. In combination with the political framework of interests, the Council of Appointment rendered politics more overtly crass and ruthless in New York than in the other states, where abstract principles seemed more conspicuous and more real.

Since there were always many more ambitious men than offices to satisfy them, even victory generated discontent. In search of their just deserts, the underappreciated scrambled into another interest to work for its electoral triumph. And so political interests were volatile and ever-shifting, requiring constant attention by vigilant leaders. Few were better at this than the Clintons, George and DeWitt. In the end, however, even they could not transcend the constraints that New York's political culture placed on the pursuit of national power.

One of the political mysteries of the early republic was the failure of New York's leaders to win the presidency by capitalizing on their state's growing

## *My Life at the Movies*

*Village of the Damned* was the movie I'd chosen
for my first date with Emily, my first
date ever, as well as my last with Emily.
It was a good movie—children with supernatural powers
turn against their parents and take over the village.
But I kept remembering how embarrassed I'd felt
telling Emily on the phone that we'd be going
to a horror movie. Science fiction, I thought
immediately. God, that sounds so much better.

Then there was *The Wreck of the Mary Deare*
with Barbara, who showed up late, so we missed
the credits and the opening scene, and never
went out again. Later *Hour of the Wolf* with Wendy
and Max von Sydow as a demented artist
who must stay awake all night to fend off his demons.

These were not, I can see now, the very best choices.
Certainly they failed to create a comfortable
romantic mood. At least with *Blow-Up*, Nancy and I
had the mystery of the end to talk about.
What does it mean when the photographer
walks away and vanishes, like the body
he'd discovered in the park? That was the Sixties,
a good time to discuss illusion and reality,
an easy time to favor illusion. When we got stoned

and watched *A Night at the Opera* it was amazing
to see everything that was going on. Groucho,
we agreed, was a genius, like James Joyce,
in fact very much like James Joyce.
Our teachers were resistant, failing to grasp
the necessary connections. Was Stephen Daedalus
like all four Marx Brothers, or only Groucho?
It was so difficult to explain. We cited
Baudelaire, mentioned the limitations
of rational thought, and were given extensions.

Movies, of course, were much better
than rational thought. Plus they had music.
How could I drive off down the highway without
the right song in my mind? How could I
break up with Nancy without seeing it played out
on the screen: a crane shot, lifting me up
and back and away in one long sweet and floating glide.
Then a slow dissolve. Or the final frame
frozen into significance. Of course

it didn't happen that way, and now
I don't remember the truth. Instead
I think of the last scene of *La Dolce Vita*—
Mastroianni on the beach, so handsome
and anguished. A young girl at the water's edge
calls to him, but he can't hear what she's saying.
Then he smiles and shrugs
as only he could shrug, as if to say he knew

that whatever lost part of his life
she represented, it was too far away from him now.
Knowing that, he could only smile
and shrug, which meant: What can I do?
We can't take the world
too seriously, no matter how lovely
you are in your white dress this morning.

**LAWRENCE RAAB**



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power. By 1810, New York had outstripped Virginia to become the wealthiest and most populous state in the union. Yet national power did not follow. The first ten terms of the American presidency went to Virginians (Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe) or to an Adams from Massachusetts (John and John Quincy). Although New York's electoral votes were critical to presidential victory, the state's leaders were repeatedly trapped into the hollow honor of the impotent vice presidency. Aaron Burr, George Clinton, and Daniel D. Tompkins all learned the hard way that the vice presidency was a political graveyard rather than a springboard to the presidency. It was a mark of ultimate futility that no other state produced so many vice presidents.

New York's leading politicians fell short less because of their personal failings than because their political base at home remained so chronically unstable. Their rivals from Virginia and Massachusetts enjoyed more secure foundations and could always find in New York some aspiring politician eager to betray that state's presidential contender. Cornog argues that Clinton failed to develop a national network because he preferred to hold city and state office rather than pursue a career in Congress. He did win a seat in the United States Senate in 1802, but less than two years later he resigned his seat and returned home to become mayor of New York City and, at the same time, to hold a seat in the New York state Senate. Cornog presents this choice as short-sighted and self-indulgent.

But Clinton needed to come home, to tend the city and state supply of patronage, lest rival interests secure control of the Council of Appointment in his prolonged absence. In the politics of his state and his day, a mayoralty and a seat in the state senate were more essential bases of power than a United States senatorship, which drew its holder away from the fierce and interminable contest at home. It was for this reason that few New Yorkers served out a full term in the Senate, and New York exercised less power in that body than the state's growth should have warranted. In returning home, Clinton lost little, and he had less choice in the matter than his biographer suggests.

In 1800, the interests of Aaron Burr, the Livingstons, and the Clintons cooperated to win New York's electoral votes, securing the presidency for Thomas Jefferson and the vice presidency for Burr. When the latter tried but failed to exploit a constitutional loophole (since closed) to steal the presidency, Jefferson combined with the Livingstons and Clintons to destroy Burr. While Jefferson denied federal patronage to Burr's followers, the Clintonians and the Livingstonians did the same at the state level. Like a canary deprived of oxygen, an interest would die without patronage for its followers.

Driven to the wall by old allies turned new enemies, Burr fled from the vice presidency to run for the governorship of New York in 1804. To preserve a winning coalition, the Clintonians felt obliged to permit a Livingston to run as their candidate for governor. Although he was an intellectual mediocrity, Morgan Lewis had the good fortune to marry a Livingston. If the marriage was what recommended Lewis to the Livingston clan, it was his mediocrity that recommended him to Clinton, who meant to exercise real power through a weak and dependent governor. To win, Burr needed to cultivate Federalist support to add to his own faction of Republicans; but Lewis prevailed, owing in part to Clinton's shrewd electoral management and in part to Hamilton's sabotage of Federalist support for his longtime enemy Burr. Furious, Burr found cause to challenge Hamilton to a duel that killed Hamilton's body and Burr's career.

It seemed that nobody remained to contest DeWitt Clinton's standing as the broker of power in New York. To his astonishment, however, the new governor chafed at subordination and sought true power at Clinton's expense. In 1805, Lewis supported a legislative charter for a new bank in New York City that threatened the profits of an older bank controlled by Clinton and his political friends. Enraged, Clinton struck back through his control of the Council of Appointment, sacking Lewis's supporters throughout the state. A year later, the Livingston interest, in alliance with Federalists, prevailed to capture the state legislature. Seizing control of the Council of Appointment, they ousted Clinton as mayor of New York.

Like Burr before him, Clinton quickly needed to recapture a share in the executive power, lest his interest dissipate as ambitious followers sought out a new leader. Too controversial to run himself, Clinton again cast about for a front man popular enough to win but weak enough to take orders. In 1807 he settled on Daniel D. Tompkins, a handsome, charming, and seemingly innocuous state judge. Tompkins's rural and modest origins could be attractively packaged for sale to the electorate as "the Farmer's Boy" made good, as an appealing contrast to the well-born and aristocratic Morgan Lewis. After an especially bitter and hard-fought campaign, Tompkins prevailed, and the Council of Appointment restored Clinton as mayor of New York City.

Confident that he had at last secured his base in New York state, Clinton sought the presidency in 1812 by seizing upon an emerging sectionalism, as Northern state leaders increasingly resented the national power of Virginia. That tension ripened in 1808, when the Jefferson administration enforced an embargo that closed American seaports to international commerce. Meant to pressure Great Britain, the embargo failed and brought financial ruin to much of the Northeast. Business interests and Federalist politicians suspected a plot by jealous Southern planter-politicians to undermine Northern wealth and growth. Recognizing the failure, Jefferson's successor Madison lifted the embargo, but in 1812 he substituted a declaration of war against Britain, a war that proved nearly as ruinous to New York City and other Northeastern seaports.

DeWitt Clinton hoped to win the presidency by quietly cultivating Federalist voters as well as disgruntled Northern Republicans. But his premature reach for national power was fatally flawed by a reliance upon the Federalist support that had proved so destructive to both Burr and Lewis. In previous campaigns, Clinton had all too effectively demonized the Federalists as aristocrats and crypto-monarchists determined to betray the republic. Persuaded by two decades of political rhetoric, a strong majority of the New York electorate would never trust a politician who flirted with the Federalist minority. At the same time, Federalist voters did not trust the sincerity of a new friend who had so long and so effectively insulted them in the past.

Moreover, Daniel D. Tompkins seized the opportunity to escape the role of puppet. Casting his lot with Madison, Tompkins reaped for himself the national patronage in New York state, the better to build his own interest at Clinton's expense. Forced to expend too much political capital at home, Clinton lost his bid for the presidency. Worse still, when the War of 1812 ended in early 1815 with the appearance of an American victory (after a long string of real but soon forgotten defeats), Clinton paid a heavy political price for his flirtation with the Federalists who had opposed the war. The pro-war Republicans depicted the Federalists and Clinton as defeatists who had nearly betrayed the nation to the British enemy. In secure control of the



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Council of Appointment in 1815, Tompkins sacked Clinton as mayor of New York City. For the first time since 1797, DeWitt Clinton was out of public office (except for an apparently innocuous seat on the state canal board). His political career seemed to be as dead as Aaron Burr's.

But it was in his seat on the moribund canal board that DeWitt Clinton saw an opportunity to revitalize his power and to renew his uncle's imperial vision of western development. Defeated at the old politics of interest, DeWitt Clinton reinvented himself as the champion of a new politics of policy. For once, he would run by advancing an issue. And Clinton's issue was visionary: state support for an immense and risky public works project—construction of a 363-mile-long canal extending across upstate New York to link Lake Erie in the west with the Hudson River in the east. In an era of limited government and hand-labor, such a mammoth public project was unprecedented. No state government had dug a canal, and the nation's longest one extended a mere twenty-seven miles and had yet to turn a profit.

Clinton's enemies scoffed that an Erie Canal was "so visionary and absurd that no rational man for one moment could seriously entertain it." With promotional flair and organizational zeal, however, Clinton mounted a publicity campaign to pressure the state government to float bonds to construct the canal. "If it be important," he preached, "that the inhabitants of the same country should be bound together by a community of interests, and a reciprocation of benefits; that agriculture should find a sale for its commodities; manufacturers a vent for their fabrics; and commerce a market for its commodities: it is your incumbent duty, to open, facilitate, and improve internal navigation." Governor Tompkins balked for fear of reviving Clinton's influence, but that very opposition inflamed a public newly smitten by Clinton's vision of boundless wealth generated by the big canal. After Tompkins left New York to assume the vice presidency in Washington, Clinton captured the governor's seat in a landslide in 1817. Giving way, the lame-duck legislature passed the Erie Canal bill just before the new governor took office.

Clinton won 97 percent of the vote in 1817, but he proved remarkably ineffectual in office. Although his landslide secured legislative passage of the canal bill, Clinton had surprisingly little to do with the subsequent administration of the project. The canal bill was passed by his chief opponent in the state legislature, Martin Van Buren, who proceeded to pack the canal board with his own supporters. Entrepreneurs seeking construction contracts recognized their need to curry favor with Van Buren rather than Clinton. A political ally of Clinton's despaired that "however noble and magnificent were his ends, he failed in providing the means for their accomplishment."

Cornog depicts DeWitt Clinton as a politician who cared too much about government and too little for politics. "Foolishly," he concludes, "Clinton divided politics from government. Government, in his view, was a noble career, one that a man of his attainments owed it to the people to pursue. Politics, in contrast, was a tawdry struggle for office, a sacrifice of principles to expediency." Moreover, Cornog insists, Clinton was no match in politics for the wily Van Buren. Cornog is partly right: Clinton did divide politics from government, and when in office he was inept at the former. Still, the dichotomy underestimates Clinton's prowess as an electoral politician, and it overestimates his commitment to governance.

In fact, Clinton was far better at winning elections than at running a government. He won four of the last five New York gubernatorial elections held during his lifetime; the lone exception came in 1822, when he chose not to run. Van Buren was the superior legislative politician, but Clinton repeatedly bested the gubernatorial candidates chosen by his rival's formidable political machine. And yet Clinton achieved remarkably little with the political capital won by his great electoral victories. The energy and the art of improvisation that were so apparent in his campaigns dissipated in his administrations. He learned how to ride policy positions into office, but he never learned how to employ an office to effect policy.

Feeling vindicated and vindictive after each electoral triumph, Clinton squandered his political capital in foolhardy feuds with the vanquished. A friend sadly observed that it was Clinton's nature as governor to "listen to no overtures until he himself, or his opponent, was completely conquered." Since electoral victories were always partial and provisional, complete victory remained elusive and governance frequently stalled during Clinton's decade in office. Still, he continued to win new elections because (like our Clinton) he was so fortunate in his enemies: men such as Van Buren, who seemed petty in their partisanship.

Completed in the fall of 1825, the Erie Canal proved to be fabulously successful, generating immense profits and escalating the already impressive (and closely related) growth of western New York and the metropolis of New York City. By 1828, the year of Clinton's death, his city had become the commercial and financial capital of the continent. Nearly half the nation's imports and almost a third of its exports flowed through its port. Thanks primarily to the grand canal and the great city, New York became the wealthiest and the most integrated state economy in the nation. In the boisterous celebrations of 1825, Governor Clinton reaped more than his share of the credit for the Erie Canal. And Cornog finally joins in that celebration: shortly after cautioning that "it is certainly possible to overstate the canal's influence," he grandly concludes that "had [Clinton] not given the project all his energies, the moment might have passed and a different America might have emerged."

In his more restrained passages, Cornog recognizes the ambivalence of Clinton's legacy for the expanding nation. The Erie Canal did enrich and strengthen New York, but the phenomenal success of the empire state complicated the nation's political bonds. After financing their own expensive but profitable canal, New York's politicians vigorously and successfully fought a federal program of internal improvements to benefit the other states. And when some of those states, principally Pennsylvania, proceeded with their own more expensive and ill-conceived canal programs, they reaped financial woes that, for the rest of the century, discredited government activism.

The Erie Canal did contribute powerfully to the economic integration of the Midwest with the Northeast, and that integration did alleviate the greatest anxiety of the Revolutionary generation: that the West would secede from the East. By strengthening the Northeast's links to the Midwest, however, the Erie Canal helped to create a North increasingly different from, and opposed to, the South. When the Union eventually collapsed into Civil War, the differences were bitter and plain. By the time of his death in 1828, Clinton had helped to make New York into the empire state, but the success of his grandiose regional vision did little to alleviate the uncertainty that continued to cloud the national prospects for sustaining an empire of liberty.

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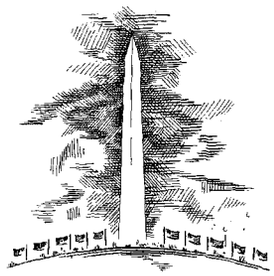
# WASHINGTON DIARIST

## Doubletalk

THE MOST IRRITATING THING about newspapers is their convention of presenting disagreements on matters of fact as nothing more than differences of opinion. Recently, a city official here resigned because he used the word "niggardly." A *Washington Post* story reported that the word "means different things to different people." Most of the Washingtonians quoted felt it could be taken as a slur, but others did not. And who is the *Post* to say which side is right? The same day, another *Post* story reported that President Clinton's Social Security plan is in trouble; it is widely thought to be a "budgetary sleight-of-hand that actually has the effect of counting twice the money that would have gone into the program anyway." Now, it is either double-counting or it isn't, but the article did not delve into the merits of the accusation. Instead it focused on the fact that "serious questions are surfacing."

THE QUESTION SURFACED, AMONG other places, in an article in last week's TNR by Matthew Miller. For those who missed it, Miller assumes the following scenario: The budget surplus is $150 billion, of which $100 billion comes from the leftover Social Security taxes that weren't used to pay for current benefits. That $100 billion goes into the Social Security trust fund. Then Clinton takes 60 percent of the total budget surplus—$90 billion—and gives it to the trust fund. That means the trust fund gets a total of $190 billion. Since this is more than the total value of the budget surplus, Miller concludes that Clinton's plan "double-counts" and is also a "scam," "legerdemain," and a good dozen other synonyms.

I ADMIT IT LOOKS STRANGE. BUT there's a perfectly decent explanation. Suppose that I loan you a dollar, and you promise to pay me back with interest. The Chait trust fund is now worth one dollar. Then, out of the goodness of your heart, you decide to give me back the same dollar as a gift. Now I am worth two dollars: the dollar I have, plus the dollar you still owe me. Clinton's proposal works the same way. Social Security brings in an extra dollar that it doesn't need this year. It loans the dollar to the rest of the federal budget, and in return the federal government deposits an IOU for one dollar in Social Security's trust fund. (The trust fund is an accounting device to keep track of all the dollars Social Security has loaned out.) Now the extra dollar belongs to the non-Social Security budget, and the government can spend it any way it wants. Clinton proposes giving that dollar—60 cents of that dollar, actually, but let's keep it simple—back to the Social Security trust fund. Then the trust fund takes the dollar and purchases a $1 federal bond from the general public. Hence, it has increased its value by more than the value of the budget surplus.



IN CASE IT SOUNDS like I'm trying to pull a fast one, let's ponder those two transactions in turn. The first part simply involves lending the Social Security surplus to the general budget. This *resembles* double-counting in the sense that the money credited to the trust fund can also be used for other purposes. Yet, while the outcry in the press might make you think that Clinton invented this tactic, every federal budget has done this for decades. Indeed, the very same Republicans who are denouncing Clinton—including self-proclaimed budget hawks such as John Kasich and Pete Domenici—have themselves proposed using the budget surplus, made up largely of Social Security funds, to pay for new tax cuts or private retirement accounts.

THE ONLY NEW ELEMENT IS WHAT Clinton proposes to do with the money after Social Security lends it to the general budget. The general budget gives most of the money right back to the trust fund as a grant, not a loan. The trust fund takes about 15 percent of the money and gives it to an independent board to invest in stock indexes. (This part is also controversial, but I won't get into it right now.) It invests the rest of the money in Treasury bills, thus reducing the national debt. Again, this might appear suspicious—how can you use the same dollar to reduce the national debt and bolster the Social Security trust fund? The answer is that it has the same economic effect as reducing the national debt. Right now there are millions of Americans who own federal bonds—IOUs for money they've lent to Uncle Sam. When the trust fund buys up some of those bonds, the public then can use the money to spend or invest in the private sector. To the extent the money is invested in efficient new productive capacity, it strengthens the economy over the long run. Also, by reducing the debt it owes to the public, the government increases its ability to borrow in the future. The only twist is that Clinton's plan guarantees that the benefits of this saving accrue to Social Security. If this still strikes you funny, consider an alternative scenario. If Clinton took the Social Security portion of the budget surplus and spent it all on tax credits or child care or wild parties in the Oval Office, the money would still be credited to the trust fund. So, if he instead saves the money for Social Security, shouldn't the trust fund reflect the difference?

ONE COMMON OBJECTION IS THAT bolstering the trust fund cannot work because it accumulates nothing but IOUs. But the debtor on those IOUs is the United States government, the safest credit risk in the history of civilization. And the creditors are future Social Security recipients, who demonstrate roughly the same level of forgiveness toward missed payments as a loan shark from the Gambino family. Anyway, this isn't a reason to oppose Clinton's plan, which boosts the government's capacity to make good on future debts.

BUT MILLER DOESN'T CLAIM THE trust fund won't be there. Instead he argues that Clinton is simply pulling money out of the sky. The "logical extension" of the Clinton plan, he writes, is "to use the same accounting trick to boost the trust fund a few extra trillion and announce that Clinton had put the Social Security problem behind us altogether." He's arguing, in other words, that Clinton's plan would have allowed him to add as much money as he wanted to the trust fund. But this is simply not the case. The most Clinton could have put into the trust fund is twice the surplus. This is a fact, not an opinion.

THE PRESIDENT'S IDEA MIGHT NOT be in so much trouble, then, if Congress and the media actually understood it. But, then again, maybe it wouldn't matter. Upon hearing that "niggardly" derives from Middle English and Scandinavian dialects, one offendee shrugged: "Do we really know where the Norwegians got the word?" Yes, maybe they anticipated that, centuries hence, the word "nigger" would become a slur in English and then subsequently become socially unacceptable, so they preemptively sneaked a similar-sounding word into the language. All I know for sure is that serious questions are surfacing.

**JONATHAN CHAIT**



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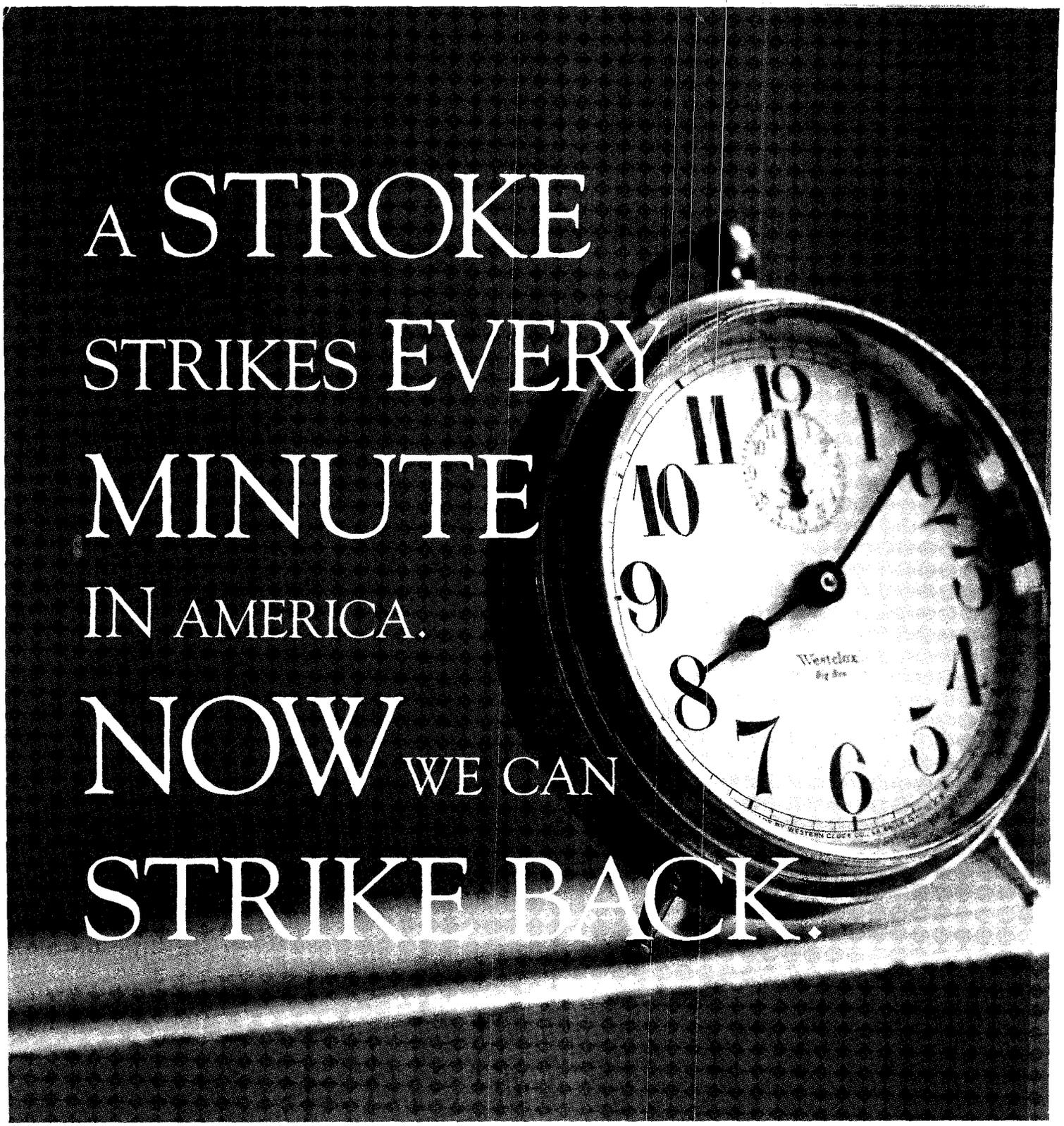


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